

Volume VII

On the Wings of the Swan

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

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Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Satsangs given at Ganga Darshan, Munger,
in 2006 to 2007*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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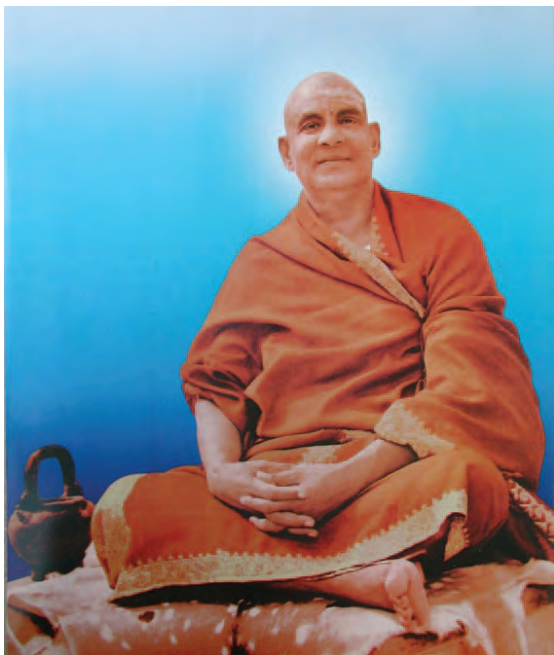
Published by Yoga Publications Trust
First edition 2015

ISBN: 978-93-84753-23-8

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

Website: www.biharyoga.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001

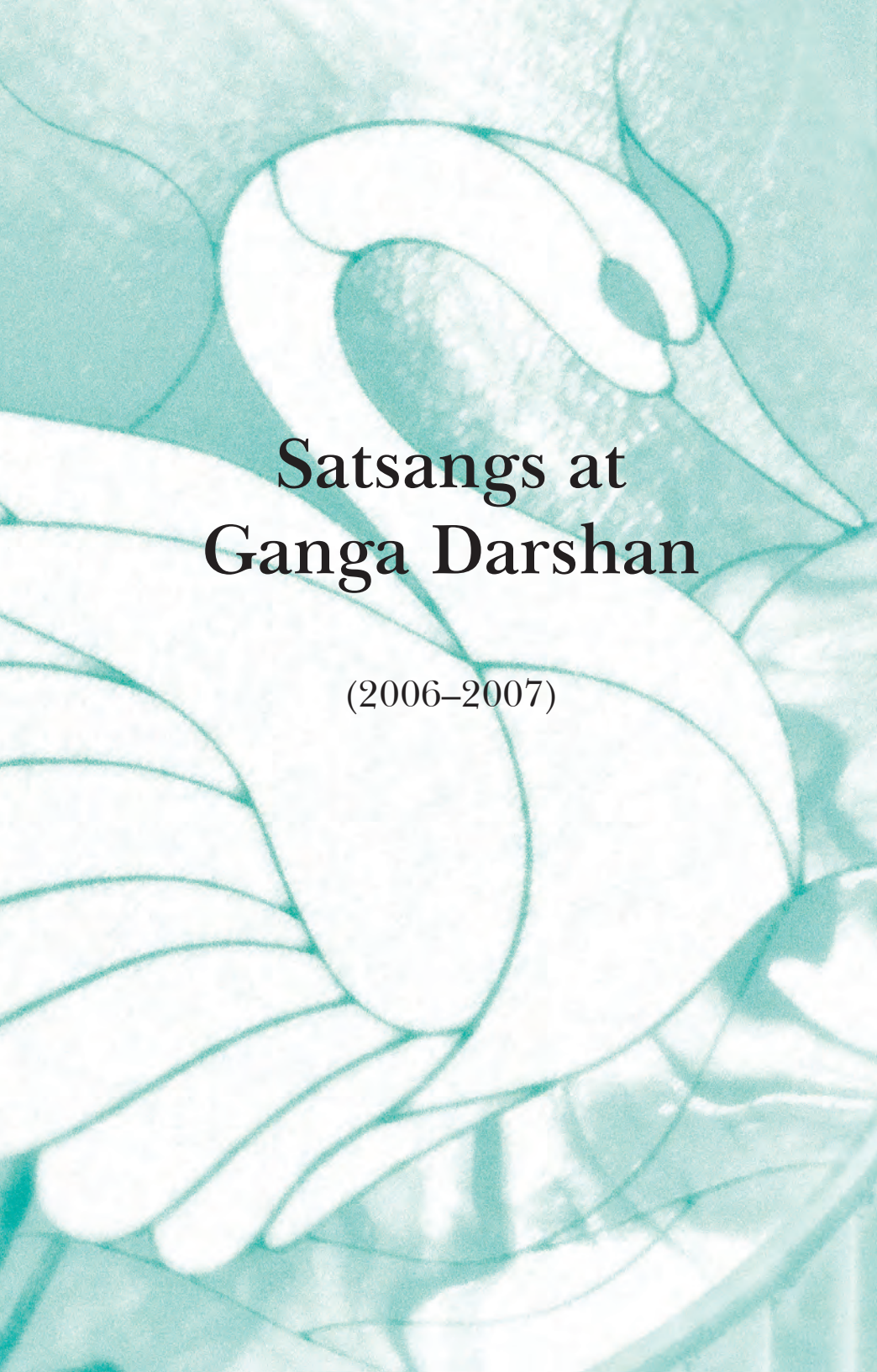


Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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The background of the cover is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this are white line drawings of a swan and lotus leaves. The swan is positioned in the upper right, facing right, with its neck curved. Below and to the left of the swan are several large, overlapping lotus leaves, each outlined with a thin white line. The text is centered over the swan and leaves.

Satsangs at Ganga Darshan

(2006–2007)

2006

SANNYASA LIFE

In the books we read, I have come across contradictions about what sannyasa life is and this confuses me. On one page it is said that a sannyasin should renounce, develop self-awareness and focus on knowledge and the final truth, and that if you still have desires and ambitions you better live a householder life. Then on the next page it is said that sannyasa life is not for God-realization, but to serve mankind, and that householder life is perfect for God-realization. So what is sannyasa life? Should I stop the wish for God-realization?

There are no boundaries, limitations or restrictions in sannyasa, nor do the social norms apply to sannyasa. In the past when sannyasa was taken by an individual it was considered to be social death. Sannyasins had to give up all inheritance, properties, money and so on, and conduct their own death rituals before coming into sannyasa. From that perspective sannyasa is social death and the social bonds do not bind one. That is point one.

Point two is this: the freedom and the experience that sannyasa talks about does not happen when you are initiated into sannyasa. It is a long and drawn-out process. If you look at the stories of different people who have come to the path

of sannyasa, you will find that each one – with the exception of a few like Shankaracharya, Vivekananda and others who came with previous samskaras and a clear destiny – had to work to develop the sannyasa culture, the sannyasa attitude, and the sannyasa conditioning in their life. So do not think that you are gifted. With few exceptions, nobody is, and those exceptions are seen in samskaras which at present are unseen in all of you.

Milestones of sannyasa

If you are trying to tread the path of sannyasa what do you need to do? You need to educate yourself with the principles of sannyasa. If you look at the stories of those people who have lived sannyasa in the present age and also in ancient times, you will find that those people were living a sattwic, harmonious and balanced life full of wisdom, and this is the key. What I am telling you are not the instructions on sannyasa. Please remember that, because I cannot give any instructions on sannyasa; it is something that has to be cultivated. The indications are given, the milestones are in place. Some people crawl, some people walk, some people run, some people hop and some people turn back; it is their choice. What I am indicating are the milestones that are there.

The first milestone is a sattwic nature, and that has nothing to do with initiation or with where you live. You might live in the mountains or you might live in a city. You might live in an ashram or you might live alone, isolated. How you live, what you eat, what you do is none of my concern at present. The first indication that is given is to develop a sattwic nature, and you have to work for that. To establish a sattwic nature is not so easy; it isn't through meditation, through studies, through this or that that you can achieve a sattwic nature. Ultimately, if you look at yourself and how you have lived your life until today, you will find that sattwa or the sattwic nature is experienced briefly and momentarily; the majority of the time you live and experience and express the rajasic and the tamasic nature. Therefore to work through the tamasic and

the rajasic nature to establish oneself in sattwa is the first requirement of sannyasa, not God-realization, not moksha, not nirvana, no.

The second component of sannyasa is *vairagya*, dispassion. Now this dispassion or detachment has to be understood as it is taught in the scriptures and not as it is defined by the intellect. *Raga* means personal association, personal identification and *vairagya* means to be without that personal association or personal identification with the objects that surround us. That is all. This *vairagya* is an expression of the mind; the mirror image of mind, because in real life we are all subject to *raga*, to attraction, attachment, involvement, identification, and we experience whatever is the outcome of that identification: the painful and the pleasurable. Now, how do we develop *vairagya* in this situation? *Vairagya* means that you recognize the existence of everything; you live with everything, but you are at the same time detached from everything, without personal identification or association, and therefore free from the effect of good and bad. *Vairagya* is assisted by *viveka*, discrimination. So, *vairagya* through *viveka* is the second component of sannyasa.

The third component of sannyasa is surrender. This surrender is not a dependent surrender, but an inner feeling of 'I am not the doer, I am not the enjoyer, I am only a medium, an instrument'. With this one believes and knows and experiences that one is an instrument of the divine force. This feeling of 'I am not the performer, I am not the doer, I am not the enjoyer' leads to surrender. The simplest way to define surrender is 'Let Thy will be done' – *Ishwara pranidhana*.

Do not talk about God

This is how sannyasa has to build up – gradually. In this preparation for sannyasa life, the cultivation of the right culture, mentality, attitude, belief and understanding, you have to leave aside your lofty aspirations and fantasies for the time being. What are your lofty aspirations? God-realization? No, that you have to leave behind because it is not something

attainable. Please forget that there is such a thing as God-realization, moksha, or nirvana.

Why then do these words exist? They exist because they indicate the outcome of your having gone through an alteration of nature and personality. They indicate the outcome and the result of you, the sadhaka, the sannyasin, having gone through different stages of change and transformation in life; they are not the aim. God-realization, moksha and nirvana are automatically there when you become sattwic, when you develop vairagya and viveka, when you develop surrender. Then at all stages there is realization; when you become sattwic there is realization.

Do not call it God, because God is too big to be contained by this limited mind. Just as you cannot contain the air of the entire world in your lungs, in the same way you cannot contain God in your limited brain or mind. Therefore do not talk to me about God at all. If you have the capacity, then speak, otherwise do not. Sitting here on earth, how shall I dream of owning the moon when I have no means to get there? If I want to go to the moon, first I have to have the training of an astronaut and an appropriate vehicle. What vehicle do you have to go to that moon where God lives? Have you trained yourself as an astronaut? No, you have not, so why are you talking about God-realization?

It is for this reason that I say that there is no such thing as God-realization as an aim of life. People say, "Yes, but in religion it is said . . ." but in reality, in practice? In the history of five thousand years how many have attained God-realization without going through this inner transformation? Not one. When all evidence is against it, why are you behaving in this totally unscientific and impractical way and desiring God-realization as the aim of life? Or of sannyasa?

Work for inner purification

In the course of time, by achieving inner purification and transcending the gross nature of life, God, that one experience, becomes a qualitative experience which is

different for every person. If you look at the story of Ramana Maharshi, you will see that it took him many years before he became Ramana Maharshi. If you look at the story of Swami Sivananda, he took many years to become Swami Sivananda. If you look at the story of Swami Satyananda, he took many years to become Swami Satyananda, and if you look at the story of Swami Niranjan, he has not yet become Swami Niranjan, simple as that. The path of sannyasa is clear: involve yourself in activity which is selfless.

When Swami Satyananda was going to be initiated by his guru, Swami Sivananda, he asked him, "What am I expected to do after sannyasa?" Swami Sivananda said, "Nothing, just continue to work in the office, work in the kitchen, carry water, work in the printing press, work in the administration, manage the office, manage the accounts, manage the ashram, do everything in the same manner as you have been doing." Then Sri Swamiji said, "If I have to do the same thing that I was doing at home I might as well go back home, exhaust my karmas while supporting and raising the family, and when I have exhausted everything I should come back." Swami Sivananda said, "No, because if you go back you do not exhaust the karmas, you accrue karmas, you accrue attachments and expectations, you accrue ambitions. They are bondages of mind. If you continue to work here you will never believe that you are working for yourself; you will always think, 'I am doing it for my guru or for God or for humanity'. You will not identify yourself as the *karta*, the doer. At home you will not have surrender. In the ashram you have to cultivate the quality of surrender." This is what Swami Satyananda did.

Swami Sivananda gave Swami Satyananda clear indications that, until the age of sixty, "You have to work and exhaust your karmas. After that, you can live the life of a sannyasin." It is for this reason I say that Swami Satyananda did not become Swami Satyananda on the day of initiation; he became Swami Satyananda forty years after having taken sannyasa. What did he do for forty years? He developed the

identification of a sannyasin, the culture of a sannyasin, the attitude of a sannyasin and the lifestyle of a sannyasin, and in this manner he came to the point where today we look to him as the ideal of sannyasa, and society and the world also sees him as the ideal of sannyasa.

Thus it is not that things are contradictory from one page to the other, no. It is difficult to outline the procedure and the process of sannyasa, because it is an achievement that each one tries to acquire, and it starts when one begins to work with one's own nature from the point where one is.

The tradition says that God-realization is ultimately the focus, but it says ultimately and not initially. You are putting the cart before the horse by saying, "My aim is God-realization, and therefore I am a sannyasin." That is where you fail, and if somebody tries to tell you, "Hey, watch your negative mind," you will say, "Ah, forget the mind, I am going to God." So nothing changes. Even after sixty years you are left with the same hang-ups, same head-trips, same fears, same confusions, same conflicts and you wonder, 'Where did I go wrong?' It's a long time before the realization comes, 'Oh, this is where I went wrong in this period'. So again, *Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi janani jathare shayanam* – "Again birth, again death, and again lying in the mother's womb" – which means we come back to start the journey again. We make mistakes, again we come back, and again we make mistakes until finally one day we get it right.

By wearing geru, white or yellow clothes, are we externalizing what is essentially an internal experience, or is it so we cannot ignore what we have committed ourselves to? The clothes invest us with attributes that we do not possess but are only aspiring towards. Do we not end up creating a false impression? Is the separation that results from them not a lie?

Who decides what the truth is and what is false? Your mind does. Just as there are different identities which one lives by, sannyasa also has its source of identities.

Sannyasa comes from the old tradition of Shiva. It is a Shaivite tradition and if we lived like such sannyasins today, the ashram would be empty, nobody would come here. If I wear a *kauppeen*, a loincloth, and put on bhasma and sit down here with a trident nobody will come here. They will say, "What is this?" However, if I identify myself with my aspirations and represent that through my deeds, then that becomes a discipline. Here, the idea is discipline, and what is this discipline? It is yoking. You see, the horse is always ready to carry the person, but in order to ensure that the horse follows your command, you have to harness the horse. A car is capable of taking you anywhere, provided there is a driver in it who maintains the systems and disciplines of the car. If the driver is careless then there is no use.

In the same manner, when you are gearing up your body and mind and spirit for sannyasa, then you have to identify with those objects that represent the component of sannyasa. Cloth is definitely one of them, because it represents a discipline, it represents a tradition. When you go into the army you have a uniform because it is a tradition. When you are in the police force you have a uniform because it is a tradition, and when you wear that uniform you become that person, the officer, and when you leave that uniform you become a normal person. There is an identification with what you wear, with what you do, where you are.

Sannyasa does not say 'Wear white or wear yellow', it says 'Wear geru as a poorna sannyasin, and wear white and yellow to represent development along the path of sannyasa'. Whatever you can achieve is good. In this way, the awareness of one's aim as a sannyasin is maintained. It is not so much about internal or external, rather it is a system, it is a tradition, it is a discipline. I give you one example. Many times people say to me, "If guru is inside us then why do we need to have an outer guru?" I ask them, "Who told you guru is inside?" They say, "Everybody says this." In the same manner, within you is your husband and within you is your wife and within you are your children.

Now, if you have your husband inside you, why do you need to get married? Why not continue happily ever after with the husband within you, just as you can live with the guru who is within you happily ever after without having to look for the guru outside? These sentiments that people say, “Oh, guru is inside” or “Sannyasa is an attitude” are only picking up one aspect or one concept of the entire thing and latching on to that.

One has to remember that it is not the dress that matters, it is the mind that matters, and the mind has to be disciplined. The mind has to be disciplined through mala. The mind has to be disciplined through *vastra* or the clothing. The mind has to be disciplined through mantra, and the mind has to be disciplined through *vatavaran*, the atmosphere or surroundings. The mind has to be disciplined by developing an aim or focus, and for it to function, the mind has to be influenced by the colour. All of these are components of sannyasa life.

If others believe that you have attributes that you do not actually possess then that is their problem. You are not creating any false impression until you allow your ego to believe what people say to be true. If somebody says you are a very intellectual, logical and good person, you begin to believe, ‘Yes, I must be that because somebody is seeing that in me. Good for me’. If somebody says you are very loving and kind and compassionate, you feel happy; you begin to believe that it must be true because someone else is saying that about you. If somebody says you are bad and crooked and evil you will not believe it in the same way at all. You will say, ‘Oh, that person, he talks nonsense’. You see, it is your own ego that is creating the false impression in you, not in other people.

Other people have the wisdom to know when immaturity is immaturity and when wisdom is wisdom, and other people can differentiate between a sannyasin and a non-sannyasin; they are not blind. It is you who creates a false impression by believing you are bad and that is what you project on to

other people, because first of all you have never known how to live like yourself. We have always put on different masks and hidden away behind those masks, hiding from both ourselves and from others, and it is the masks that we wear which give the false impression. If you are good, you are good; if you are bad, you are bad; if you are cranky, you are cranky; if you are positive, you are positive; and if you are negative, then you are always negative. Through association these qualities are seen.

There have been certain sannyasa traditions which have said *Nindak near rakhiye*, meaning ‘Keep a critical person beside you who can tell you what your true nature is’, a critic who can nag you day in and day out until you begin to tear out your hair. You are not capable of doing that yet, and I don’t think you want to be, but there were some people like Kabir Das who have done this.

There is nothing that you can call the ‘absolute truth’ and there is nothing that you can call an ‘absolute lie’. They are all interpretable, and it depends how you interpret them. If your interpretation is right then people recognize you as you are. If your interpretation is wrong, then the impression you are creating is something you are not. That wrong impression is one you are creating and not the public. That is how I see it.

Can absolute detachment and absolute surrender coexist? That’s what I seem to be experiencing, which is different from what I was experiencing until coming here. What do I need to know to place things in perspective?

As long as there is the body, as long as there is the mind, and as long as they are both functioning in a restrictive manner – as they are – there cannot be anything absolute in life. Who are you to decide that you are experiencing the absolute? Do you know what the meaning of ‘absolute’ is? What you consider absolute is only a partial perspective in relation to your conscious development, because in this context ‘absolute’ means the conscious, subconscious and

unconscious states coming together and behaving in one manner. That would mean you have overcome the *vasanas*, the desires or inclinations, the *samskaras*, and all the restricting and limiting traits of life. Then absolute surrender can happen. If you feel that you have come to the absolute, congratulations! Please let us know your path so we can also make an attempt to have that experience.

Can genetics be changed?

This is a very interesting concept if you analyze it. In the spiritual traditions, the genetic transformations that happen at the time of *sadhana* when the old building blocks of life are altered and new ones created have been spoken about. For example, those hybrid seeds taken from our grains, rice and wheat have been genetically altered to produce bigger and better crops, but for how long will they survive? Maybe for one or two crops only, and then they are finished. However, the ones that have not been altered continue to live, and we can produce that same crop over and over again for years. This is an idea that scientists have to think about and analyze. When you genetically alter a grain, you are removing all the limitations and exposing the grain to its full potential, so the first crop is wonderful, but you cannot keep the grains for the second crop because their potency is finished.

In the same manner, it happens to a body and to a person, too. After you have attained realization the consciousness has been genetically modified. I am using the words ‘genetically modified’. After you attain realization, the DNA of the body has been genetically modified, it has gone through a change from gross into transcendental, and in this way the yogis or the *siddhas* become hybrid human beings. They only live one life because all their potency has come to the forefront while the normal ones continue to multiply from the same crop year after year.

—20 February 2006

Swamiji, for a person aspiring for spiritual life as a pure beginner, what is the right attitude and the most important quality that he has to develop within himself?

I do not see or believe that there is a beginning or an end to spiritual life, because the whole idea of spiritual life is based on a pure and simple principle. This principle has been mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* in the form of *Samatvam Yoga Vishad* – “Yoga is how to find the balance and equilibrium within oneself.” This equilibrium is samatvam yoga, the balance between the attainable and the unattainable, between the perfectible and the unperfectible, between that which gives one happiness and that which gives one unhappiness. It means a balance between the two polarities of life. This is the first stepping stone in spiritual life.

This idea of balance does not end as long as there is life. Life is an expression of paradoxes from the time of birth to the time of death. Even up until the time of death one has to find the strength to experience balance. One has to find the strength to work and live in a harmonious way. Living in a harmonious way means living with awareness of the health and illness of the body, with awareness of the pulls of the mind, and with awareness of the attempt to find harmony and peace. The discovery of this harmony and peace constitutes the first foundation stone of spiritual life. Everyone says yoga begins with asana or that spiritual life begins with discipline, but from the facts, ideas and experiences of the teachers and masters, real spiritual life is developed and experienced when one begins to take control over the fluctuating states of the body and mind, and brings about balance in their expression.

Therefore, you have to make the effort and attempt to find this harmony: harmony in thinking, in behaviour, in action, in living, in the environment, in the profession and at home. The different practices of yoga do help, different sadhanas help, but the realization of spiritual life begins with balancing oneself. Therefore, whether a beginner or an advanced student, one must always try to find this

harmony in action and in non-action, in pain and pleasure, in happiness and discomfort. This is the ultimate test of human spiritual effort.

After discussions with people at different yoga centres, my impression is that yoga helps to keep you away from stress and also to treat the psychosocial aspects of disease. Will it treat or cure diseases such as neurological disorders like Alzheimers, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy? Can it help to treat debilitating diseases like AIDS? If yes, then how?

The most important thing to know and to remember is that yoga is not therapy. It should not be looked upon as therapy rather it should be seen as a way to discipline one's life. This discipline or *anushasana* is multidimensional; it is physical at the level of annamaya kosha, pranic at the level of pranamaya kosha, mental at the level of manomaya kosha, intuitive at the level of vijñanamaya kosha, and spiritual at the level of anandamaya kosha. These are the five dimensions of human existence in life and these five dimensions are activated and regulated with the practices of yoga.

In the process of their activation and regulation, the imbalances which cause distress in the body, the mind or the emotions are identified, and with continued practice these imbalances are managed. With the management of these imbalances there can be the attainment of physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing, and it has been found that in the process of regulating annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha and manomaya kosha, many psychosomatic illnesses are helped. However that does not make yoga a therapy.

Multidimensional yoga

The moment you use yoga as therapy, you are treating only one aspect of your nature, one aspect of your personality, and yoga will become ineffective. Therefore, many people feel that they are not being helped with yoga practices

although they are doing it religiously and vigorously to obtain relief from their physical disorder, while other people, without much effort, feel the benefit of yoga because they have been balancing and disciplining all the five dimensions of their personality. We have found that even with the simple practices of pawanmuktasana miracles take place in the management of many disorders. I believe that the pawanmuktasana series alone, if practised in the right manner, can eradicate many physiological and psychological imbalances. You do not have to go into the specific, diagnostic level of asana and their benefits, what they do, and what they do not do.

Of course, nobody has time to think along these lines. Everybody wants quick results. Although there are many teachers and traditions that teach yoga as therapy, we do not agree or subscribe to that philosophy; in that form of therapy there might be relief temporarily, but not a permanent management of disease. This has been the tradition which Swami Sivananda himself followed. He was a medical doctor. People would go to him and he would treat people with allopathic medicine and, where appropriate, encourage them to practise the different systems of yoga to have long-lasting health and total management of their problems. In the course of his teachings, our own guru Swami Satyananda also came to the point where he taught us to look at the five dimensions of a human being and to treat each dimension, not just one. That is in relation to yoga as therapy, as a discipline and as a lifestyle.

Today science is starting to become aware of both its own limitations in the management of different problems and ills, as well as the variety of areas involved in the treatment of a person. Science is also looking into these different areas and methods, not for treatments, but to change and improve the quality of life. Treatment is the negative aspect while to improve the quality of your life is a positive aspect. Today there is no treatment that can give total cure. The majority of treatments are related to symptomatic treatment only: for

example, you take pills to manage your hypertension, but it does not cure the cause of hypertension. With diabetes, you take tablets and injections to manage your diabetes, but not to cure the cause of it. In asthma, bronchodilators allow you to breathe more freely, but they do not cure the cause of asthma. In this manner, practically all treatment methods are symptomatic treatments, not curative methods. The cure can only happen when all the dimensions of personality are considered, and then the distress and disturbances are taken away from all these levels.

Therefore it becomes difficult for us to accept yoga therapy. We do not accept yoga as therapy, we accept yoga as a discipline to promote health, physical and psychological wellbeing, and to promote spiritual awakening. With these three one enjoys total health. There are many examples which I can give that indicate how many simple, basic practices of yoga can manage complex problems. Our research in Australia on cancer patients showed that pawanmuktasana part I, yoga nidra, ajapa japa, and nadi shodhana pranayama helped the reversal of cancer in patients. Yoga programs developed for HIV patients include pawanmuktasana, yoga nidra and mantra – and that is all, which of course science or medicine will not believe or accept.

I feel that it will take time for yoga to understand the scientific approach and for science to understand the yogic approach. When this happens in the future, we will have a powerful tool for attaining health. Until then there will be many discussions on scientific and medical forums and on ashram grounds, and in each place you will get a different answer.

How shall a person behave at the workplace if there is a lot of competition generating negativity?

I have never worked, so I have no experience, but I will tell you what I believe in and what seems to have helped other people. Yes, there is competition, there is negativity, there is confusion, there is miscommunication, there are conflicts,

there are problems; there are many things that happen. The power structures and power plays are there, so those things happen. They have been happening since the time of Adam and Eve and they will continue to happen until the end of the world.

What should one do to manage this situation or this condition? Focus on your own excellence, and that is it. Nothing more needs to be said. Focus on excellence and try to excel in everything that you do without worrying about other people, without worrying about yourself, without worrying about your ambitions, drives and motivations, for they will be changing all the time. The drive to obtain excellence in everything that you do will ensure that you will always achieve and succeed in life.

What can we do to feel the presence of the guru tattwa in us?

Learn how to be a disciple, because until and unless you are a disciple, you will never experience the guru tattwa. So do not worry about awakening the guru tattwa in you, do not worry about experiencing the guru tattwa in you. Try to become a disciple and focus on your discipleship because it is only through that that the guru tattwa can be experienced.

Our course is coming to its end, and during our course we have spent a lot of time in seva and so have interacted with swamis-in-charge. Some of them have been nice and others were not so nice. Is there a method in how swamis should behave with us?

A very appropriate question. Let me tell you something: all those who wear geru are not sannyasins; they are normal human beings with the same mindset that you have, the same set of ideas and thoughts that you have, the same set of needs and problems that you have. The only thing that makes them different is their inclination to discover something within themselves and their dedication to that. One should look at sannyasins not as perfect beings, but as people who have

taken upon themselves a sankalpa to go through hell and fire in their life in order to come out on the other side as a better person. So hats off to the sannyasins. Whether they are positive or negative, they are trying, just like you are.

—28 April 2006

In the learning ground of life between birth and death what aspect or principle should we imbibe?

The question is, ‘What should be the major learning in life?’ If you look at the social concept of life, you will discover an interesting affair. Take the example of the flatline, which denotes eternal time and eternal space. In this flatline there are spikes or standing waves that sometimes come up, very much like the EEG graph; you see a flatline with spikes shooting up from it. Those spikes that appear represent life, the momentary experiences of life in eternal time, in eternal space. This momentary vertical experience of life limits time and space. You begin to exist as one form, as one object, for whatever time you exist, for whatever time you live, and this spike of life is a symptom of an invisible process which is known as karma. In this context, *karma* means activity that governs life in total.

The senses are bound by their karma; karma represents the character and behaviour of the sense organs. The mind is bound by karma, and the mind is characterized by the karmas. The character or maturity of the mind is identified by the karmas that the mind is subjected to. Emotions have their own set of karmas. All of life is an interaction or interplay of karmas, nothing more than that. The biggest lesson that one can learn in life is understanding and managing the karmas.

It is through the understanding and management of karma that one becomes spiritual as well, because while a karma can bind a person, that same karma can also liberate the person. When the karma becomes a binding and restricting force, a force which holds the consciousness

to the material nature, then you live in the realm of *bhoga*, craving pleasure and enjoyment. The way to manage this karma, to free and to liberate the person, is yoga. If you analyze the yogic system, you will find that yoga manages the karmas. How do we manage the karmas of the senses? How do we guide them? Through *sanyam*, restraint. The classical definition of *sanyam* is given in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, and this can be a whole separate topic, the classical definition of *sanyam*. The restraint of *sanyam* is to manage the karmas of the senses. Wisdom, what you call *jnana yoga*, is the means to manage the karmas of the mind and behaviour and attitude. Having faith in God is the way to manage the emotional karmas.

All these things that we are discussing have to be seen from a psychological perspective. Having faith in God is not a religious process, rather it is a personal psychological strengthening. You strengthen your conviction, your willpower, your confidence, and your clarity by developing faith. The development of faith creates a psychological state of expression in which there is sensitivity, unity, compassion, love and affection. Therefore, psychological transformation happens just with the cultivation of faith. In the same manner, with restraint of the senses a change will happen, a psychological transformation will happen. The same happens when one follows the principles of *jnana yoga* – a change of perception will take place. In this manner, the practical aspect of managing, understanding, and evolving through one's karmas is yoga.

The theoretical aspect of understanding the karmas is knowing how the individual responds to the different karmic influences. Therefore, yogic understanding, realization of one's purity, of one's qualities and quirks, is the outcome of having managed one's karmas. This is the role of *yama* and *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara* and *dharana* before attempting advancement and perfection and *dhyana*. Therefore, management of karmas is the lesson that one learns in life, not spiritual illumination.

Swamiji, in the *Bhagavad Gita* it is written that the need for self-preservation can be a hindrance to one's spiritual development. How does one balance the need for physical health and the needs to transcend these limitations?

That is the wrong interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Bhagavad Gita* has not spoken anywhere about self-preservation. The word that has been used in the *Gita* is *dehadhyasa*, identification with the body, not self-preservation. Self-preservation is a built-in instinct of every life form. That is not to be denied. The question here refers to the statement in the *Gita*, which speaks on this deep identification with the body, *dehadhyasa*. When there is deep identification with the body, the body becomes too much the focus, and if you analyze yourself carefully you will find that you are all in one way narcissistic. You like to look at yourselves and identify with the physical body and groom the physical body so that you look pleasing and beautiful. There is so much care given to the body; each pimple is looked at, each blackhead is looked at, each whitehead is looked at, growth of every hair is looked at, and measures undertaken to colour or dye the hair, to put on body cream, face cream and powder to change the complexion. In this area you are narcissistic.

This *dehadhyasa* means one who does not see beyond body. This, according to the *Bhagavad Gita*, is the identification that one has to transcend because body awareness definitely binds one to the sensorial and the sensual. Wherever there is the sensorial and the sensual awareness, the forces of *rajoguna* and *tamoguna* become strong and predominant. Thus when Krishna speaks of transcending and overcoming the body identification, he is referring to this state in which the mind is subject to the power of the forces of *rajoguna* and *tamoguna*. The whole attempt of the spiritual journey in life is to develop the *sattwaguna*, the *sattwic* quality. This statement of the *Bhagavad Gita* has to be seen in this context, not in the context of self-preservation.

Swamiji, could you please tell us something about purity?

Purity is attainment of the sattwic state in life. Life revolves around rajas and tamas. When it revolves around rajasic and tamasic behaviours, then these qualities create the corresponding change in the mind and in the personality. If one is subjected to rajas, there will be aggression and assertion. If one is subjected to tamas, there will be stagnation and lethargy. What then does purity mean in this context? It means establishing one's self in the sattwic nature; that is the first step of purity.

After all, if you want to construct a house, you need to have the right tools and materials for construction. If you want to build a citadel of purity in your life, you need to have the right tools and materials. The tool is movement from tamas to rajas to sattwa. The material with which this purity can be built and developed is the sattwic nature in all respects, in all dimensions, in all strata of life. Until and unless sattwa becomes established, one should forget about purity, because until then, purity is only a fantasy, an ideological concept. Effort has to be made to move from rajas and tamas to sattwa. After you have reached sattwa we can discuss how to develop purity, but not before.

Why do you think most people have such a strong feeling towards being in a relationship?

Well, you should read the book *Practical Yoga Psychology*. This question refers to the behaviour and traits characterized by mooladhara awakening. When mooladhara is activated in people, there is a need for a relationship. Not necessarily physical, not necessarily sensorial or sensual or sexual, but to have that idea, feeling and conviction that 'I am in a relationship where I am supported, where I am secure and safe, where I receive love, friendship and affection'.

Insecurity is an inherent human instinct. Insecurity changes with age. When you are young, you are dependent on your parents; you are carefree because there is an unconscious or deep understanding that you will be looked

after, and so you enjoy life. However, there comes a change in life when you realize that now you have to look after yourself. You have to get a separate identity for yourself; you cannot use the same identity as your parents, so the entire motivation and direction of the mind changes. You begin to cultivate and develop your own relationships, your own friendships, and your own group of people, and in them you find somebody who you think will be a support to your life. Then the social act of marriage comes in.

Relationships represent the need for security; the need for friendship, the need for recognition and the need for personal and emotional fulfilment. All these characteristics are associated with mooladhara and swadhisthana chakras and this is where everyone is at present. There is nothing wrong with it. There is no harm in it and it is not against any spiritual principle either. However when you think of spiritual life, of course the spiritual component will come into the relationship, and this spiritual component changes the entire relationship.

For example, Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a married person. He was married to Sharada Devi. When she came to the house to live with him after marriage, Ramakrishna would worship her before doing anything, like a goddess, like Devi. He developed a relationship with his wife that was not in the form of 'wife and husband', but in the form of 'Devi and devotee'. This was the relationship that he was most happy and satisfied with.

Sri Swamiji has said many times that in spiritual life also one has to develop a relationship. As this insecurity is material, we are searching for its fulfilment, security, in the outer dimension, but the same security can be attained by linking and connecting with the divine nature. Therefore he said that to develop a relationship is important, even with God, and one has to understand what that relationship can be.

The Indian traditions speak of five different forms of relationship with God. They are known as *bhavas* or

emotional attitudes. One can have *sakhya bhava*, the relationship of friends, *dasya bhava*, of servant and master, *madhurya bhava*, of lovers, *vatsalya bhava*, of mother and child, or one can have *vairya bhava*, the relationship of enemies. Like this, there are different relationships that can be cultivated with God, but it is not something that one can decide instantly; it takes time. You have to go through each one to see where you fit. Sri Swamiji has said that ultimately he decided that his relationship was going to be that of master and servant. He could have decided ‘I will be best friends with God’, *sakhya bhava*, but for him the appropriate was master and servant, *dasya bhava*. Like this, one has to come to a conclusion in one’s lifetime. The direction of the relationship can also be changed to make it more uplifting, positive and constructive by transforming the mooladhara insecurity and swadhisthana fear into positive forces.

—5 June 2006

FAREWELL MESSAGE TO THE BYB STUDENTS

Swamiji, you usually stress the importance of a strong and balanced personality, but during the four months of our Yogic Studies course you have hardly talked about *mumukshutva*, the desire to find liberation. Keeping this desire, can we also walk on the path of *seva* or service, *daya* or mercy, *prem* or love, and *karma* or action? Can we all grow in these qualities or not?

In the life of a human being there must be a balance between the external and the internal natures; between the material and social nature, and the spiritual, transcendental or transformative nature. Only when these two come together will the development and the enjoyment of life begin to happen. Prior to that you are caught in the web of either materialism or spiritualism. The people with a material bent

of mind think in a different way when they are caught in maya. For them that is real. Those in spiritual maya, in their own spiritual imagination, fantasy, expectation and desire are also caught. One can become free of the influence of this maya, the ambitious and desirous maya, by cultivating balance between the external and the internal.

When you live in society you think, live and act in a particular way, and you fulfil your obligations and duties in a particular way. There are defined parameters that regulate social behaviours and social expression. Similarly, those who work in the spiritual realm also have to work within the environment and the limitations of the spiritual world, for that spiritual world is being expressed by the same body that is involved in the material.

Therefore when you practise yoga, the yogic journey enables you to discover the other dimension of yourself, the dimension of life which was previously unknown to you, and that is the inner life, the spiritual life. You might have had ideas about it previously, but there was no connection with it. Yoga created that connection, and the ashram created that connection. 'Ashram' in the sense of the community, the place where you are made to observe, where you are forced to analyze and be a witness to yourself, your nature, your personality, your needs, your aspirations, your shortcomings, your qualities. This internal awareness is the first step: an inner awareness of 'This is what I am and how I respond'. Then after the cultivation of this awareness comes the training of the mind.

Anushasana

The training of the mind in yoga is through *anushasana*, which does not mean discipline but an awareness of a disciplined nature. *Anu* means the subtle, the unseen, the unknown, the imperceptible and *shasana* means to govern over, to rule. Therefore yoga is defined as *atha yoga anushasanam*. The moment you begin to modify and readjust your life in relation to the karmas, to the desires, to the

expectations and associations yoga begins. This beginning of yoga is anushasana: the realignment and readjustment. Anushasana is the subtle restructuring that has to happen to create an awakened condition. This yogic conditioning is neither *rajasic* nor *tamasic*, meaning neither aggressive nor lethargic, but it is *sattwic*, pure and harmonious. The development of sattwic conditioning enables positive dormant faculties to manifest, and this is what happens in yoga. The regulation of lifestyle through the practice of yoga leads to internal harmony, anushasana, and enables one to realign, readjust and rebalance one's life. This is the biggest contribution of yoga from the yogic perspective.

Mumukshutva

The question was about *mumukshutva*, the desire to be liberated, the desire to be free. This concept of mumukshutva is not only spiritual, it is also social, physical, emotional and mental; it is the need to be free from the existing negative conditioning and restricted knowledge. No journey begins without the undercurrent of mumukshutva, the desire to change. If there was no mumukshutva, yoga would have no meaning. There would be no interest or attraction to spiritual subjects or even to religion or philosophy, let alone changing one's lifestyle or belief.

When mumukshutva, the desire to change, become better, transcend one's limitations, mature in life and evolve spiritually, comes from within, that is the motivation for sadhana. One is attracted to the practices of asana because of mumukshutva; one is attracted to meditation because of mumukshutva; one is desirous to change the quality and the condition of life only because of mumukshutva. Mumukshutva is the undercurrent, the force of transformation, the force of change without which yoga is incomplete, without which any internal discipline is incomplete.

In this limited time of four months you have had the first exposure to the subject of yoga as it can be applied in

your life. The practical process gave a deeper understanding of the physical body, of prana, and of the role conscious awareness can play in improving the quality of body. The theoretical side has helped you understand yogic concepts in relation to life. Through these practices and theories, the first chapter of your yogic life has been written.

Now the next chapter of your life will be written when you go back home with this yogic understanding and yogic awareness. You will be going back to the same environment, same profession, same city, same job, same family, same circle of friends, same society, same stress, same needs, same aversions – and then you will see how your mind responds to these situations. Your success in yoga will depend on how you respond to these situations. Success in yoga is not decided by who can practise the most complex spine-twisting posture. Yes, that is an attainment, an achievement no doubt, but not the ‘finishing line’. Perfection of yoga is seen in how you manage your life with greater understanding, with better awareness, through thoughtful, pure concepts and creative action.

The third chapter will be written when you gradually try to start bringing the yogic attitude and the yogic awareness into your normal life routine as well. Then you will notice the difference, you will notice the change. So observe how well you write the third chapter of your life. I am sure you will find a very different story and the ending will be a story of excellence and success if you can follow the application of yoga properly.

—11 June 2006

Should we observe any restriction in the act of giving?

The act of stealing involves a lot of planning. An act of giving must involve four times more planning. For a bad and evil deed one plans and thinks for months and months and does not make any attempt until one is sure that no harm will come to one. What happens is divine providence, but once one becomes sure that the total planning is

pukka, perfect, one goes and commits that bad deed. Yet with a good deed there is no planning, no thinking, just a jhukav, an inclination. When one gives just as a spur of the moment action, it is not considered an act of giving. That is considered to be an act of 'passing the buck', with the thought, 'I've done my good deed. I've done my pious deed', and that is it. This is one cause of failure in life.

Nobody knows how to give. Giving a present is no gift. Giving a flower is no gift. Giving money is no gift. Giving of implements, tools, houses, and cows are not gifts, rather they are the medium by which something else is attained. What is attained through those items is encouragement, teaching, hope, and knowing that somebody cares for you. This has to be planned. In what direction does the life of the person whom you are planning to help have to develop and evolve? The biggest example of giving at present is in Rikhia, because in Rikhia the act of giving, whether it happens to one person or it happens to 10,000 people, has a focus and direction that will take the life of all of them towards their goal.

A farmer will become more skilful and more acquainted with the rules and techniques of farming. A labourer will become more efficient. A child will be more interested in education and learning. In this way, each life can be given a direction through the act of giving. This is the richest planning in the act of giving that I have ever felt and seen. Each person is being directed on a particular path for peace and prosperity. Whatever the outside act may be, all of them are living their own destiny and fulfilling their own destiny, living their own life and getting trained to live that life in a dignified manner.

Therefore, as beginners, do not take up the act of giving as your subject. It can become a powerful tool for peace and prosperity if there is proper planning, if there is proper implementation, if there is proper organization both externally and within the individual. The person who is giving has to have clear facts and well thought-out ideas. Therefore, Swami Sivananda does not really advocate giving

for beginners. For him, giving comes third. He says, first learn how to serve. After that, learn how to love, because until and unless the idea of service develops and matures in you, until and unless the idea of love develops and matures in you, there is no such thing as giving.

Can a mother become a catalyst for change in the routine and behaviour of her grown-up children?

I do not know about mothers, fathers, sons or daughters, but I know that as individual units, as individual beings, everyone has certain obligations and responsibilities to help one other. However, instead of helping each other you try to impose yourselves on other people, and when you find that what you want to impose has not really been accepted by the other person, conflict takes place; aggression comes forward and suppression happens with individuals and within groups. This psychological disturbance creates a split, a distance between two people.

Parents have the biggest psychological problems in the world because they do not see their child as having his own destiny, his own karma, and his own life. They see their offspring as an extension of their ambition and not as having their own life. Parents try to give the samskaras of their ambition to their children right from birth so that their children become endowed with their samskaras. As a parent, how can you say that you cannot control your child, when right from the beginning you have given him the direction in which to move?

It is the parents who have the problem, not the children. Parents can overcome their problem by learning not to give the samskara of their ambition, but the samskara of their life to children. When the basic foundation is proper, the building will be good, but if the basic foundation is not according to the structure that has come up, the building is going to crash one day or another.

How to cultivate the spiritual samskara, the right samskara? Rather than trying to cultivate it in others, first

cultivate it within yourself. Cultivate the quality of being a friend to your child and then talk with your child. First create that change in yourself. Do not be a father, do not be a mother to your child, be a friend. Develop that association and you will see that this association can work miracles, because it will give and teach them the samskaras of life, and not make them a carbon copy of your lost dreams and unfulfilled ambitions. In this way, parents should not worry as to how they can change their children. Parents should be concerned with learning how they can be a friend to their children.

—11 June 2006

Why are there so many rules and disciplines in the ashram? Can't we just use our common sense?

Rules have to be there and common sense has to be there, and if you are asking me which to follow then I would say, discuss it with your in-charge. Take law for example – something is written down, but what is written is interpretable by each one in a different manner. A brilliant lawyer can use the same law to free a person and a stupid lawyer can use the same law to create problems for the person. The law is the law; how people interpret it, how people use it, how people identify with it, that is very much a personal expression. The same concept applies here too.

Yes, there are certain rules and disciplines in the ashram and it is up to people to decide how they interpret them, how they respond to them, and how they face them. If they interpret, respond and react to them in a negative way then there is problem. If they respond to them in a positive way then there is no problem. So this is not a question for satsang, it is a question that you need to address to yourself. See how you are responding. Everyone is responding and reacting in a different manner, including the in-charge, but if there is an understanding of the purpose and the goal, there will be fewer conflicts and ego clashes. If they are fewer, you

are the winner; if they are more, you are the loser – so this is a question that you have to ask yourself.

—21 June 2006

We all have so many ideas and feelings and interpretations about the idea of God. Perhaps many of these are personal, so that when we are thinking about God as a presence, we are putting our own interpretations on to Him or Her. Could you clarify this for me, Swamiji?

No, I cannot. Actually whenever somebody asks me a question like that, I feel it is not worth replying to, and I am being straight about this. To begin with, I do not know. We have the tendency to classify everything as either male or female or in different colours, and if we do that, then even insects would be thinking the same thing: ‘Is God an ant? A red one or a black one?’ If that is the scope of thought of every species then human beings will always think that God is a human, either male or female, and a certain colour, shape and size. They will try to imagine God in their image, whereas an ant would imagine God in its image, a bird would imagine God in its image. Every created form in the universe has its range of experience, and everything is classified within that according to what we are.

That is the foolish nature of the people who have imposed this idea on spiritual beliefs, systems and philosophies, and made spirituality a religion. The Vedic tradition has given a clear answer: God is the expansive nature. Whatever the range of perception, that is God; beyond that is God, before that is God, everything is God. You are able to perceive or realize that according to your level of evolution, your inner evolution, because it seems that in the realization of God the outer evolution does not play any role. As people evolve externally, meaning physically, they seem to become more distant from their original nature. Therefore it is not the outer evolution that matters – how we will look in one hundred or five hundred years time, what the shape of

our brain will be and whether we will become telepathic or whatever. No.

Do you know what people project for the future? They project a person who is awakened, active and highly capable intellectually, and that is happening today. For example, IQ level has shifted from 100 to 150, and progressively it will continue to shift. That intellectual power is no indication of spiritual experience, however; it is the inner evolution and the unconditional simplicity of the self which counts towards realizing the spiritual nature or godly nature.

Would a disharmonious fallout with someone or something exist in the region of the kleshas?

Yes, because it is the kleshas that colour our needs, it is the kleshas that colour the aspirations and desires. *Avidya* or ignorance will colour it, and *asmita*, I-ness, will colour it. *Abhinivesha* or the fear of death will colour it, and all insecurities, fears, and lack of perception will colour it. Therefore, the sadhana to overcome the avidyas has been described in the vedic and the tantric traditions in the form of vidyas: the thirty-two Mahavidyas in the tantras and the *Shodasha* or sixteen vidyas of the Vedas. They are *vidya*, which means knowledge, the antidote to *avidya* of the five kleshas.

Purushartha or effort in the negative context can become adharma; righteousness can become unrighteousness. Piousness can become vileness. Expansiveness can become a fundamental illusion. All that happens, and the negative fallout of adharma is what we are experiencing today. Therefore in the Vedas it has been stated that there are a few things which have to be tested all the time. One thing that has to be tested from time to time is the relationship with one's wife or husband. Another thing that has to be tried and tested from time to time is one's philosophy, belief or religion. It states clearly in the Vedas that these things have to evolve, to correspond; they have to respond to the situation, condition, environment, location, place and time.

Friendship has to be compatible, just as a relationship between husband and wife has to be compatible and tested and tried. Philosophy, religion and the structured system for social development have to be verified again and again. A teacher comes; he teaches A-B-C-D then goes away. After some time another teacher comes; he teaches the next stage and goes away. After some time yet another teacher comes and teaches the following stage and goes away. That is how the vedic tradition evolved, because in this tradition you will find acceptance and denial of everything under the sun. It does not speak of one idea, one thought, one belief, one philosophy. All the rishis have tested out the pros and cons and put their findings in the vedic texts, whether it was positive equals right or negative equals wrong. There have been other people who have said, “My teacher who taught the A-B-C-D is the final one,” and would not look beyond. They have become rigid, whereas the vedic philosophy says, “No, things have to change, evolve and adapt to the present environment.”

Should we start to study the Upanishads then?

It is good to study them, but there is something lacking in that study. I feel that in the Upanishads the theme is not clear. Therefore the study is for the sake of study, not for the sake of understanding the direction in which a particular teaching is leading one. Take the *Ishavasya Upanishad* for example. What is the theme of the *Ishavasya Upanishad*? All the slokas give a statement about *vidya* or *avidya*, knowledge or ignorance; about *mrit* or *amrit*, death or immortality; about *Ishwara* or *jagat*, God or the world. Given that information, what is the teaching taking you towards? You can say, “It is philosophy,” but then even that should have a focus, an objective. Which objective is fulfilled after you practise pratyahara or dharana, after you practise karma yoga, mantra or japa? Which objective is fulfilled when you study the *Ishavasya Upanishad*?

After you open your mind, what is the thrust? It can be said that the thrust of the *Ishavasya Upanishad* is to make you aware of the vidya component. If you begin to live vidya

in your life, meaning that you live in the light of wisdom and knowledge, then you begin to differentiate between the real and unreal, between the complete and incomplete, between the auspicious and inauspicious. As that mentality is cultivated, you begin living the purpose of the *Ishavasya Upanishad*, which is developing your mind, your awareness, your perception, and which eventually takes you towards *Ishwara pranidhana* or the complete surrender to God's will. Therefore, living that realization will take you through the process of vidya. That is the focus of the *Ishavasya*: to live vidya, to live wisdom. It makes you aware of all the different points that it has presented to you and it allows you to develop your judgment from them and to incorporate them into your lifestyle.

Like this, if you can decide what the focus of each study is going to be before you go into that study, you will find that study will take a different meaning all together. Therefore the gurus become the lamp-posts. They are the people who say, "Now this sadhana, this focus, this direction." Then the text can be put into practice. However, if you use the text as a teacher, it simply will not work.

—27 June 2006

What is the method or process of living in the present without being disturbed by the past or future?

What is the method? Very difficult. I believe that only through yoga can one acquire the ability to do so in the course of time, because there are two factors in life which are important; one is memory and the other is worry and concern. Memories are always associated with the past, there is no memory of the future; memory is always of the moment gone by. The moment that has passed has become the past and memory pertains to that dimension. Memories are factors that determine human evolution as well, for they create the *samskaras*, the archetypes and conditionings, and also the thought patterns, behaviour, attitude and nature.

Your personality and mentality are made up of different memories put together. Your responses, your reactions, they are nothing but memories put together.

The second component is the concern, the worry which comes from the craving for life. Where there is craving for life there is also insecurity: 'What will happen tomorrow?' Craving is always associated and related to the future. If I want prosperity, the idea of prosperity with which I am identifying at present is futuristic. This happens by looking ahead to the future, by identifying with the zeal or love for life, by identifying with the sense of insecurity as to what will happen tomorrow. 'Today I am a pauper, so how do I become prosperous?' Similarly, insecurity, worry and concern are the factors which make you plan for the future.

The swing is between memory and concern. That is the swing of a wild pendulum, a pendulum that sways from one side to the other and does not remain fixed. Where is the present moment in this process? In the past, there is a point where the movement of the pendulum stops and begins its return journey. In the future, there is a point where the movement stops and the pendulum begins its reverse journey. Therefore, the past has a point where memory stops, and the future has a point where planning and concern stops, but the present has no point of stopping; it is just a continuous movement. Then what can one do? How can one be aware of the present? To be aware of the present means stopping the swing of the pendulum so that it is neither affected by memory nor concern for the future.

That stage of stopping is what is known as *samadhi* in raja yoga. Stop the swing in the present – that is the idea of *samadhi*. It is a stage where you become free from the memories of the past, free from thoughts of the future, and you are able to focus on your own stability – where you make the attempt to work with yourself. However that is a long process, and for that one has to re-discipline one's life, one's mind, and one's efforts in life. They have to be restructured once again and it is a difficult process.

Process of elimination

Is there an easier method? You can come back to the point where yoga can be used as a tool, a tool to develop creativity and awareness of the present moment by deriving understanding from your past memories, and using that understanding to overcome the present blockages of the karmas and samskaras. Having a creative and optimistic frame of mind will ensure that your future is fuller and more complete.

For this there is yoga: a little bit of asana; a little bit of pranayama to harmonize and realign the energies of the body, the electromagnets of the body; and a little bit of yoga nidra or relaxation. Do not allow stresses and tensions to take subconscious and unconscious roots; rather allow the process of elimination to happen just as it happens in the body. After all, when you eat something, the food is digested and the waste product is expelled. The same rule should apply to the mind; only the unfortunate thing is that nothing is expelled from your mind. The waste product is accumulated and that is the reason for mental constipation, for mental diarrhoea, for depression, for frustration, for neurosis, for psychosis. All the mental imbalances that occur happen because you have not yet eliminated the accumulated toxins from the mind. Yoga nidra, relaxation and meditation are important for that – to release the constipated mind, to release the bilious and gastric mind, and to make it light, healthy and quieter.

Develop positive qualities

With a little bit of asana, pranayama, relaxation, meditation and also self-observation, try to cultivate one positive quality per month and try to overcome one negative quality per month. It is possible gradually to transform one's life, to develop better habits, to overcome those habits which are destructive, degenerative and harmful in nature.

Cultivate better habits which are health-promoting and peace-promoting, and focus on the practice of four

items: a selection of four or five asanas, a selection of two pranayamas, one twenty-minute yoga nidra practice, and one twenty-minute meditation practice. In the meditation practice, focus on the breath and mantra for ten minutes, and in the remaining ten minutes focus on the analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Ask yourself, 'What are the weak areas of my life that I want to strengthen this month? What are the positive areas of my life which I wish to cultivate this month?' Rather than connecting with the problems and head-trips, connect with your inner nature and fine-tune it. In this way you will feel that you are preparing and transforming yourself in the present, which will give you better dividends in the future. Therefore, combine a good series of asana, pranayama, yoga nidra, meditation and self-study, and I am sure you will find that it will help you a lot.

—15 August 2006

What is discipline and what is yogic discipline? What is restraint and what is suppression?

Let us start with suppression. I do not have to define it, you know what it is. As long as something natural, normal and regular is happening, there is no cause for suppression in life. However, when the normal and regular becomes abnormal and irregular, then suppression comes in as a way to balance that irregularity. High ambitions, high dislikes, high likes, high expectations, all this is happening at the unconscious level. At the unconscious level, when you are not able to deal with the high ideas and expectations, mental confusion sets in and the process of suppression begins. You start to suppress this, that and the other in order to maintain your balance and peace.

Suppression is treated as a circumstantial, environmental and social factor but in reality suppression is misrepresented. Suppression is that which does not allow us to attain or achieve. This principle, this thought, this idea can be applied to any situation in life and you will find that it is true.

Suppression is there in relationships, suppression is there in beliefs, suppression is there in ideas, and suppression is there in expression. Some is in the guise of tradition, some in the guise of moral and ethical values, and some in the guise of discipline, like the yamas and niyamas. Suppressions are often self-created also.

The theory behind natural suppression is quite simple. You plant the seed. It grows. In the course of its growth, many little branches and leaves come out. It has to be cleared to ensure that the tree grows fruit. If you do not prune the tree, if you do not shape the tree, you cannot ensure that it will grow. Similarly in our society and in our laws, whether social, spiritual or religious, there are limiting factors which restrict and inhibit the lopsided growth of human nature. When you are unable to understand that, there is a reaction, and the reaction is generally one of rejection. The reaction is usually overly assertive, and generally made to prove that one is right and the other is wrong. The reaction is always to justify something in order to feel happy that 'I have not done anything wrong'.

Restraint brings in the component of understanding. When you begin to understand your nature, your environment and your surroundings and you begin to live in accordance with your surroundings, restraint becomes a natural part of life. This restraint leads to discipline, which is the fine-tuning of personality and habit. Here is one simple example: What you call discipline may be waking up at four o'clock in the morning. Why is the mind so weak that it cannot wake up at four in the morning? After three days of waking up at four, after one week of waking up at four, after one month of waking up at four, you fall flat. That means that the strength of the mind can only last for one week, ten days, or one month before you fall flat. When you struggle with yourself then that is known as imposing discipline on yourself.

There is a better way to deal with this problem. I give you my example: I used to sleep a lot when I came first

to the ashram in my early days. I was such a deep sleeper that people could carry me from one end of the ashram to another along with my chowki, my bed, and I would never even know it. There were many days of my life when I woke up outside the gates of the ashram at twelve noon. I decided, 'I am going to change this habit'. Now first I started off like all of you, I had the alarm clock set at four. On the first day I was up early and alert. Second day I was up early and alert. Third day, up but not alert. Fourth day, up but not alert. Fifth day, up and then down again. On the sixth day it was back to square one. One day of rest and then I started again; it was the same old story.

I was told, "Wake up at four o'clock," but struggling to wake up at four in the morning was imposing something on myself that I could not control or manage. So what to do? There was a solution. What time did I normally get up? Six o'clock. On the first day I set the alarm for five minutes to six. On the second day, ten minutes to six; third day, quarter to six; fourth day, twenty minutes to six. Like this, every day the alarm was set back five minutes; five minutes less until five o'clock was reached. Then I carried on with waking up at five for another week until again I started reducing the alarm by five minutes. It was a gradual conditioning, a gradual training that took me from the state of a deep sleeper to a state of mind which could wake up simply by deciding, 'I am going to get up at this time'. If I had struggled every day with the alarm set at four, it would have been a hard imposed discipline that I could not have perfected, and I would have failed not just once but regularly. To live yogic discipline or *anushasana* there has to be proper tuning of the mental attitude, mental pattern, mental behaviour, mental conditioning and mental habit.

Discipline is therefore something much deeper than suppression or restraint. Discipline is a fine-tuning and conditioning in which the habits are gradually lessened. H-A-B-I-T spells 'habit'. How do you lessen it? Remove the letter 'H' and 'A BIT' will remain; when you are comfortable,

remove the letter 'A' and 'BIT' will remain. After some time remove the letter 'B' and 'IT' will remain; and when you become comfortable with this, remove the letter 'I' and only 'T' will remain. In that way, you lessen your habits. You fine-tune your personality. *Anushasana* or yogic discipline is the fine-tuning of the personality where restraint indicates understanding of your reactions, whereas suppression indicates ignorant responses and reactions.

—10 November 2006

ON THE ROLE OF YOGA IN SPORTS

Swamiji, as athletes, can you tell us how we can win the gold medal in the Olympics?

What I know about Indians is that they can do a lot of things if they bring their minds to it. Regarding sports, we have not had good facilities, but wherever facilities have been provided people have excelled. The focal point of energy for Indians is not the body but the mind. Pay attention to this; this is a scientific truth. The structure of the body depends on the environment, the food and the climate, and Indians have developed accordingly; their focus is the mind. People have not taken this seriously, but historically this has been the case. Take the example of Arjuna. The archer was asked, "What do you see?" The others said so many things but only Arjuna said, "I see only the eye." The aim, the energy, the will became one – the mind became *ekagrata* or one-pointed.

In the media one sees that the performance of Indian athletes is good, but then they start to think, 'We have already reached it', and that brings their downfall. When you start winning, the sharpness of the mind is blunted. Therefore, it is necessary for Indian athletes, along with the sport, to keep their minds under control and not let it become distracted, agitated, or disturbed. The mind has to be controlled. Westerners often have energy of the body as they are generally more extroverted, while Indians are

introverted, so self-management has to change. Indians must stop comparing themselves with others and figure out how their stamina and endurance can increase.

Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* give some sutras on how one can reach peak performance in sports. Sutra 1:14 speaks about *abhyasa* or practice: *Sa tu dirghakala nairantaryasatkarasevito dirdhabhoomi* – "One has to make the effort over a long period of time, uninterrupted, and with *shraddha*, faith." Only then will the effort become successful.

What is the importance of pranayama in sports?

There is a relation between body posture and breath. For example, while throwing a javelin you will breathe out, and when you are punching someone in boxing, breathing out will give you more force. Even in normal situations the control of breath is used.

Regarding control, it has been said that if breath control is used when the body is tired, then the tiredness goes away. For example, in an experiment two separate army platoons were trained, one doing normal push-ups and so on, and the other doing yoga. In the final testing, which was running with a 20 kg load, the yoga group came out on top. In that group three soldiers failed, while in the non-yoga group, twenty failed. Therefore pranayama is useful in every sport.

—Talk with members of the Sports Authority of India,
14 December 2006

INITIATION – STARTING THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

What is mantra diksha?

The English meaning of *diksha* is initiation. The word 'initiation' indicates a beginning, to begin something, to start something, to initiate. 'Diksha' comes from the Sanskrit root *drish*, which means 'the ability to see', being able to see, but to see what? The spiritual practitioners and spiritual thinkers have conceived of two dimensions of life. One is the social,

physical and material, and one is internal, spiritual and non-physical. In the external dimension one goes through different stages of growth and maturity, from a beginning which also has an end. In the internal, spiritual dimensions one has to begin the journey by realizing this dimension, this level of existence.

Spiritual life does not begin until one is initiated. No amount of meditation, no amount of asana and pranayama, no amount of doing the right thing at the right time, and no amount of religious discipline indicates that one is spiritual until and unless one is initiated. Initiation is a *samskara*. In fact, initiation is the passport to access spiritual life. In the spiritual traditions it has been clearly stated that you can practise fifty or sixty years of meditation and other such spiritual *sadhanas*, but they will not be realized or fructified until you are initiated. Without initiation, anything that you do follows only the traits and the whims of the mind, ‘This is what I like to do, so I do this’ and ‘I am inclined to this meditation so I do it. I am not inclined to this meditation so I ignore it’. These mental traits and whims continue to dictate and guide your so-called spiritual aspirations without your even knowing what spirituality is or coming to the level where you can experience that spirituality.

From the yogic perspective, the first realization of the inner nature takes place when you connect yourself with your vibratory self, because this vibratory self reflects the unknown, the hidden and the dormant area of human existence and personality. This vibratory self is known as the *vijnanamaya* body. Yoga students know of the five bodies: *annamaya* or the material body, *pranamaya* or the energetic body, *manomaya* or the mental body. The fourth is *vijnanamaya*, the psychic body, the realm of chakras, the realm of subtle energies governing one’s physical body, nature, personality and kundalini. The last body is *anandamaya* or the bliss body.

How do we cultivate the *vijnanamaya* body? Access to *vijnanamaya* body happens with the use of mantra. Mantras

are *spandans*, vibrations, and the vijnanamaya body is also vibration. When you repeat the mantra appropriately, the frequency, the vibration and the energy of the mantra will stimulate and activate the corresponding centre within you. This is the beginning of one's spiritual journey in life. Therefore, mantra diksha is considered to be the first step, and a sure step to spiritual discovery. In all the yogic and spiritual traditions mantra initiation is the first item, the passport. Through mantra you access the inner dimensions of your nature; you go deep into your personality. You can use it to awaken the *chakras*, the psychic centres, and use it to internalize the awareness. You can use it to discover the source of strength within you. Mantra can fulfill many roles in life, and the word 'diksha' means the ability to see the hidden aspects of your own nature. This is the meaning of mantra diksha in brief.

Is the timing important for diksha? How do you know that it is the right time to take diksha?

You want me to tell you the trade secrets? Then I will have to resign and you will have to sit in my place. Timing is known as *muhurat* or *muhurta*. What is the function of the calendar? January 1st is what? March 15th is what? The solar calendar system is used to measure time. However in the lunar tradition the calendar has five functions; it breaks down time in five parts and therefore our calendar is known as the *panchanga*, the five parts of time. It speaks of time not only in the form of hours, minutes and seconds, but it also speaks of the influence of the celestial bodies on human beings, such as which deity is prevailing at that time and what effect the constellations will have on today's date both globally and individually. 'Calendar' is also a Sanskrit root: it is *kalantar*, 'kal' and 'antar', meaning a difference in time.

The differences in time are known as muhurtas. During the twenty-four hours of the day, during the seven days of the week, and during the twelve months of the year there

are different auspicious and inauspicious periods. The application for diksha can be given at any time, but the giving of diksha happens when the *tithis*, the lunar days, and the muhurtas are appropriate. Even in twenty-four hours there are times which belong to ethereal bodies, ghosts and ghouls. Their time is between midnight and two o'clock. This is the most inauspicious period, the time when destructive and imbalanced cosmic energies or natural energies run rampant. Then there is the *Brahma muhurta*, the auspicious time which is between four and six in the morning. Like this, there are many different muhurtas during which the magnetic and the electric fields of the planet are in tune with the magnetic and electric field of the individual. Those muhurtas and those deities are identified, and then initiation is given at the appropriate time.

To answer your next question, when is it right for a person to take diksha? When you feel inclined! How do you know when is the right time to fall in love?

Why should a yoga practitioner take diksha?

It is not necessary. A yoga practitioner need not take diksha. It is the spiritual aspirant who has to take diksha. There is a difference between a yoga practitioner and a spiritual aspirant. There are hundreds and thousands of yoga practitioners in the world who go to stretch their bodies, and there are many traditions that are physical in nature and do not emphasize the need for mantra. Yoga practice as such does not require initiation. However, those people who wish to cultivate the spiritual component of their life need the right tool, and for them diksha is important. After all, if you want to turn on the light in a room, you will have to find a switch. Diksha acts like a switch to illuminate the dark dimensions of the room that you have not yet been able to look into. Therefore, only those who are keen and aspire to develop the spiritual component of their life need diksha, not every yoga practitioner.

I am thinking about applying for a passport to the spiritual life, but just as when undertaking any journey I first ask myself, ‘What should be the purpose of entering spiritual life?’ Can you please enlighten me?

You have to find out for yourself what your destination is. One has to define a goal for oneself, although different masters, gurus and scriptures have given indications towards the directions one can take. For example, if you read Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, then it will take you towards samadhi. If you read the *Bhakti Sutras* of Narada it will lead you to *sayujya* or total merger. If you have read the theory and philosophy of Buddhism then it will be *shoonya* or nothingness. Your ideas have been shaped by the books or scriptures you have read, or even by people you have come across.

You have to discover what it is you want to gain in your life. How do you see yourself ten years down the line, twenty years down the line, fifty years down the line? What kind of person do you want to be physically, mentally, spiritually, socially and in every respect? With this analysis of life you can then have a focus and create a goal, and you will discover that however you live there is fulfilment in that.

I will give you my example. When I became conscious of who I was, I discovered I was already a sannyasin, so this was my way of life right from the beginning. However sannyasa alone was not enough. I asked myself questions. Even as a sannyasin, what do I expect from myself in my life? What kind of professionalism can I have in sannyasa? Which component of sannyasa do I need in my life that I will be able to express forty years or fifty years down the line as well? I thought about that. What is it that I can cultivate today and that I can keep on cultivating, rather than only use today and forget about later? With this thinking one has to come to know and then give a direction to one’s inner aspirations and inclinations. Therefore, you think about it. Much has been said, spoken and written about this.

If we have decided to apply for a ‘passport’, does it matter to which branch, office or country we apply? Do we need to stick to one specific tradition or bestower of passport?

For a passport you only have to fill out the application; acceptance or rejection depends on the police report and the processing authorities. One man came and gave the application for a passport and I gave him the passport, the mantra diksha, and I will tell you the mantra I gave him. This is the important bit. The mantra was *So-Ham*.

This man went back, and after three months a very important and famous *acharya* or master visited his place and everybody said, “Look he is great, he is old, he is experienced, you should take the mantra from this *acharya*.” The man with the passport goes to the *acharya* and tells him, “Look, I have already received initiation from Swami Niranjan, but do you think I should take something from you?” He said, “Yes, yes, yes, but I will not change the mantra, I’ll simply add one word before it,” and he added the word *Da*. Instead of *So-Ham* the mantra became *Da-So-Ham*.

A few months later the man came here for a visit and said, “Swamiji, I do not know if I have done something right or wrong, but I have also taken initiation from this Vaishnava *acharya*.” I said, “No problem. What’s the mantra?” He said, “Well, the mantra is still the same, *So-Ham*,” So I said, “Where is the problem?” He said, “Oh, he has only added the word *Da* before that, *Da-So-Ham*.” I said, “No problem, you add another word on my behalf – *Sa*.” So the mantra became *Sa-Da-So-Ham*.

Three months later, again the Vaishnava *acharya* came to his place and asked, “How is your initiation mantra going?” The man sheepishly said, “You know, Swamiji changed it again in Munger.” “So what has it become now?” said the *acharya*. “It is *Sa-Da-So-Ham*.” “No, no, no. You put *Da* again,” said the *acharya*.

The mantra again became *Da-Sa-Da-So-Ham*. Three months later again I changed it. I added *Sa*; *Sa-Da-Sa-*

Da-So-Ham, and this continued for many years. The other acharya was not leaving this disciple, and I was not willing to leave him either, so ultimately this little two-syllable mantra, *So-Ham*, ended up as *Sa-Da-Sa-Da-Sa-Da-Sa-Da-Sa-Da-Sa-Da-Sa-Da-Sa-Da-Sa-Da-Sa-Da-So-Ham*! I always believe that God gives us not what we want, but what we need.

Stay with one

If you decide on a particular *parampara*, a particular spiritual tradition, stick to that, because too many cooks in spiritual life will mess up the dal. It happened once with Sri Swamiji many years ago when he was at home during Diwali. Everyone was supposed to wear new clothes, so they brought some new clothes for him, a pair of pants. The pants were slightly larger than his size, so to be able to wear them properly he went to his mother and he asked her, “Can you cut these by two inches?” Mother said “I can’t, I am busy preparing for Diwali, go and ask your grandmother.” Sri Swamiji went to his grandmother with the full pants and asked, “Can you shorten them two inches?” The grandmother said, “Right now I am doing my pooja so I can’t do it now. If you want it done quickly, go to the ayah. If not, leave it in your bedroom and I’ll do it when I am free from my pooja.” Sri Swamiji said, “Well, I want it quickly;” so he went to the ayah and said, “Cut these by two inches.” Ayah said, “Look, I am cleaning the house right now, I can’t. When I finish my cleaning I will cut them. Put your pants on top of your bed in your room.” Sri Swamiji went and put the pants on top of the bed.

Ayah came after half an hour and took two inches off, and left them there. After forty minutes grandmother came, took two inches off, and left them there. After two hours his mother came, took two inches off, and left them there. When Sri Swamiji came to wear them he found that they had gone from full pants to half-pants!

God has given us one legally sanctioned choice: one father, one mother, one husband, one wife, one guru. There

can be many illegal husbands and wives, but only one is legally sanctioned.

Whenever I go anywhere I keep a map with me that shows the route I am to follow to reach my destination. What would my map be on this journey, and what are the milestones that will indicate where I am?

A map indicates something which has already been discovered. You cannot make a map of that which is undiscovered and uncharted. What has my discovery been? What has Swami Satyananda's discovery been, and what has the discovery of Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, or any other person for that matter, been? It has been the expression of each one's potential, not yours. Swami Satyananda came to a point of realization because of his inner potentials. Swami Sivananda came to a point of realization because of his inner potentials. Christ came to a realization because of his inner potentials. Prophet Mohammed came to a realization because of his inner potentials. Guru Nanak and Ramana Maharshi came to a realization because of their inner potentials. So the chart which they have made is not going to be applicable to us. They can only give us the main tools like, 'This is how you build a ship which will not sink as you sail the uncharted waters', and that is all.

Getting the right tools and the right equipment is important because once you begin sailing, you are discovering your own inner oceans: your own inner whirlpools, your own samskaras, your own karmas, your own joys and sufferings, and your own interpretations. They may be right or they may be wrong, but you have to chart your own path. The only guideline that can be given in this life is how to make the boat.

We will help you make the boat and tell you, "Once you are on the sea, follow that star for thirty days and you will come to land. Land there and you will find an 'X' engraved on a tree . . ." Like a treasure hunt. We all go on a treasure

hunt, and you will get a map for the treasure hunt but it will not be that detailed. It will have the necessary access code on it though. It is like the game of Monopoly. If you get the wrong numbers on the dice you will go to jail, and if you get the right number on the dice you will become the owner of a property. You can do what you will; what number is going to come up on the dice – that nobody knows. This is known as faith. Although everybody has to travel the same road, not everybody stops around the same station, but everyone has to go around in this game of Monopoly.

THE GURU

What is a guru?

There is no such thing as guru. Guru is only a reflection of one's commitment and faith; otherwise that person is also a disciple of somebody. Sri Swamiji says, "People have recognized me as a guru, but internally I am still a disciple of Swami Sivananda." If you look at the statement you will find the right reason behind it: 'guru' is not a title acquired through one's effort, rather it is something like a label given to that person by others. If the guru is true and sincere to the path, that guru will never consider himself or herself to be the guru, and will instead continue to be a disciple and perfect discipleship in his own life. Therefore, what actually exists is discipleship, not gurudom. 'Guru' is only a label given by some person who thinks 'Oh, this person is nice, he must be a guru. Let's start calling him guru'.

If people give that label it is not even worth considering; if today people can make you a guru, tomorrow they can make you into a devil or a dog. Do I then become a dog? If people begin to call me 'devil' tomorrow, do I become a devil? Today, if people call me 'guru', do I accept this just because it boosts my ego? 'I have become a guru!' So, many people recognize me as the guru, but if tomorrow you start calling me devil or dog, then what? In reality there is no such thing as guru; there is only perfection of discipleship.

If I wish to become initiated into spiritual life, does it necessarily mean I need to become a devotee of the person by whom I am initiated?

Actually, this is a question on the guru-disciple relationship. You are all normal people living a normal life outside and then something happens; you become interested in, or inclined towards, discovering something different, trying out something different, and you come to yoga. People come to yoga and gradually, as their involvement in yoga increases, they come to understand that yoga is a little bit more than the physical and the mental, and that little bit more is what we call, 'spiritual'.

How does one define spirituality? Is God-intoxicated consciousness the definition of spirituality, or is it simplicity and innocence of the heart, which is full of love and compassion? Is being endowed with all the good and positive virtues of life the apex of spiritual realization? One has always been free to define what spiritual realization means for oneself. It meant *samadhi* for Sage Patanjali and it meant *sayujya* or oneness for Narada and Shandilya. Each propagator of yoga or spiritual life has defined the goal according to their knowledge, their understanding, their inclination. All of these definitions have become a body called 'yoga and the spiritual life'. God-intoxication can be an expression of somebody's spiritual life, why not? Total simplicity, innocence, and a life full of love and compassion has also been the hallmark of many such people. Each one has defined and lived a particular lifestyle, and that definition and the corresponding lifestyle has been known as spiritual.

Seeing one's self

One can become an adherent of yoga or any other tradition because of inclination or because of default, but the desire for and the search for spirituality begins when you go into the meditative states of yoga, into *pratyahara* and into *dharana*. There you begin to discover something new about

yourself, your nature, your personality. Meditation becomes like a microscope to see the viruses and bacteria that exist inside one's personality and nature. They exist there even now, but just with naked eyes one cannot see the virus or the bacteria; one needs the help of a microscope. In the same manner, the process of internalization through the meditative components of yoga – the pratyaharas, dharanas, and the dhyanas – begins to act like a lens which focuses an aspect of your personality, highlights it and shows you that aspect clearly.

Antar mouna, the practice of inner silence, is an example. Here you are highlighting a thought and pulling it to pieces; you are following it to the end. One idea or thought has been highlighted at that particular moment. Similarly, other ideas and other thoughts are highlighted at different moments. This process of internalization turns the mind into a microscope and you begin to see the genetic structure, the bacteria and the viruses inside your body. You see the samskaras, the karmas, the latent impressions and desires, the instincts, the modes of behaviour that make up your nature and what you are today. The fine-tuning of this particular dimension that has unfolded before you is the beginning of your spiritual life according to yogic thought.

Walking the path inspired by guru

I am giving you a complete picture so that you can understand the answer to your question. The discovery within oneself, of oneself, and the discovery of oneness is what you undertake in spiritual life. How it happens, when it happens, that only God knows. You do not know where the end is. You know that you have to walk the path, and in this discovery of oneness and in this discovery of oneself, one has to connect to an inspiration.

That inspiration is the guru, the teacher. In that person you see a reflection or something shining bright. You do not know what it is, but that shining and bright nature makes the person stand out, radiating a different kind of aura. One is

attracted to that aura, to that energy, and many times that attraction becomes the inspiration to initiate the spiritual journey. This has happened in the lives of saints; they have become inspirations to initiate one into a spiritual journey. Saints both living and dead have become the examples of certain achievements in life, and these people who attract others are known as the *gurus*, the people who dispel the darkness or the ignorance from one's life.

Imagine a torch shining its light. The torch is not dispelling its own darkness, it is living in a state of illumination, and wherever its light falls the darkness has been dispelled. This guru tattwa is also internal, and it is this *tattwa*, this element, that you have to connect with in order to establish yourself on the spiritual path or in God-consciousness, in wisdom and in light. The external guru, the one whom you have identified as the guru, becomes the trigger to connect you with the internal guru. The theory is simple, but to put it into effect is difficult, because everyone's emotions get in the way.

Transcend emotional bondage

If you can bypass your emotions the path is absolutely clear, but if you fall prey to emotions such as dependence, affection, attraction and dislike, there is a definite deviation from the course that you have chosen for your life. This is another point: emotions become a barrier. They create dependence and they even create a lethargic mind. The mind becomes lethargic because one is not thinking about survival any more. However, if the understanding is clear then the association becomes clear as well. If the association remains in the form of inspiration, one can be with that inspiration until the end of one's days, and one's spiritual progress depends on how one is able to contain oneself and purify oneself internally, both intellectually and emotionally.

I mentioned as a joke that there is no such thing as guru, but I hold to that statement: there is no such thing as an embodied guru. 'Guru' is the name of a state of

inner spiritual maturity, and consciousness is maturing and evolving every lifetime through the experience it gains. Some people can connect with the cosmic consciousness, the *akashic* consciousness. Those who connect with this akashic or cosmic consciousness become enlightened and they live their life according to *dharma*, the appropriate and righteous precepts.

Dharma is not always based on compassion and goodness; dharma can also create strife in order to eradicate evil, like Sri Krishna did. In order to establish dharma he created a civil war. Therefore it is not that dharma always follows the intellectually justifiable course of action. It uses all the tricks of the trade: *sam*, *daan*, *danda*, *bheda*, or praise, gifting, punishment and discord, in order to achieve its goal. After all, in order for a person to live, a gangrenous foot must be cut off. If you do not cut a gangrenous foot, that gangrene will affect the whole body and it will kill you. If there is gangrene in the body, what do you do? By cutting off the afflicted part you will be lame for life, but to survive you will have to cut away the part. This example shows that goodness does not always follow the path of love and affection, healing through peace and quiet. There is dynamism in it as well: there is change, transformation and transmutation of the present into something new. As long as the guru is the inspiration, there is an expression of love, respect, obedience, devotion and dedication, for that is the natural expression towards anything that you desire or want or cherish or hold dear.

When emotions become involved in the expression of the sentiments of love, respect, obedience, devotion and dedication, they take on a different meaning. When you are detached from them and they are expressed naturally, spontaneously and innocently, they become a force which brings you closer to your inner guru. Once the understanding of the inner guru dawns, once there is a glimpse or a flash of that experience, the feeling and the discovery of oneness begins.

In the clear association with guru and the guru tattwa there is purpose and focus, and there is a feeling of inspiration, conviction, optimism and brightness in life. It may be there in one moment and then gone the next, due to the cloudy mind; clouds can cover the sun, but the sun always keeps shining and the covering is only momentary. Connecting with that inspiration is more important than worrying or head-tripping, 'Am I devoted, am I not devoted? Should I be or should I not be? Is it good for me or is it bad for me?' That will divert your awareness, your attention and focus from experiencing your innocent and pure nature. This innocent and pure nature is directed towards the inspiration that motivated you to discover the beautiful nature within. People express that connection with their inspiration in many ways and you are free to choose your own.

THE MANTRA

What is the difference between mantra and prayer?

Prayer is to make the expression of the heart reach God. When you have trouble or want to express gratitude, you express it to him. Mantra is to make you introverted and reach the depths of your own being. Mantra connects you to yourself and prayer expresses your *bhavana*, your emotion.

Kirtan and stotra are all mantras and we have been told that they influence our vibratory body. We begin every class with Gayatri and Mahamrityunjaya mantras and they too influence us. What is the difference that makes the initiation mantra so special that it becomes the 'passport' to spiritual life? Are the other mantras only just tourist visas?

Yes, the other mantras are tourist visas, because they only take you to one destination and then bring you back. If you get on a flight with a ticket to London, you will end up in London at the end of the flight. If you want to land in Athens instead of London, you cannot change the flight midway. Similarly,

all mantras are like those tourist destinations; they take you somewhere and then bring you back. Mahamrityunjaya mantra takes you towards a healing station. Gayatri mantra takes you towards educational institutions, to school.

Universal and personal mantras

There are different routes and therefore mantras have been classified into universal and personal mantras. Gayatri mantra, Mahamrityunjaya mantra and the mantras that are sung during kirtan are all universal mantras. The stotras are universal; they are chanted by everyone regardless of where they may be in their spiritual evolution. When they are chanted by people who have not been introduced to this concept, the understanding they develop is that the mantra is a prayer to God, not that mantras affect different centres and chakras of the body or activate different pranas of the body. Even the majority of Indians, if you tell them to chant Gayatri mantra, will think you are trying to convert them into Brahmins. It is not like that.

Then there are private mantras. These private mantras are the personal mantras, the personal frequencies of each person. The frequency that is active is intuitively felt by the teacher, by the guru or master, and the mantra one is given becomes the personal one for life. It helps regardless of whether or not you practise the other ones. If you have a headache and you take an aspirin, that is fine. If you are having a headache you can chant your Mahamrityunjaya mantra, perfect. If you are suffering from Attention Deficit Disorder you can practise your Gayatri mantra, perfect. You can even use these universal mantras as vitamin pills that you take every morning. However your initiation mantra is the personal mantra that you need to practise in two ways: as sadhana and as a part of life.

Two forms of practice

Practising as a part of your life means that you can keep repeating your mantra mentally for one minute, for five

minutes, or continuously when you are walking, when you are sitting, when you are alone, sleeping, cooking or travelling. Not as meditation, but with eyes open as part of the normal daily activity like walking, running, jogging. The only exception is not to do the mantra while you are driving a car or something requiring your whole attention. This is the natural spontaneous mantra practice.

The second practice of mantra is as sadhana. You select a time for yourself, say fifteen minutes at night, at a time when you are free and undisturbed by your partner or by the television, and sit down quietly for fifteen minutes in a meditative posture. Wear the cloth that you get with the mantra, dis-identify from the body and the experiences of the body and say to yourself, “For fifteen minutes I am not this body, not the experiences of stiffness and pains and aches related with the body, not having a good experience or a bad experience. I am not this body.” Dis-identify with the body, then dis-identify with the mind. “I am not the mind. I am only a witness. I am not the experience of pain and pleasure, like and dislike associated with the mind. No feeling or emotion like hatred, jealousy, love or desire can wean my mind away. Right now I am just my pure luminous Self.” With this idea of luminosity and purity, you practise two malas of the mantra.

The way of practising mantra is in these two forms: the simple way, meaning repetition anywhere and at anytime, and the sadhana way, meaning fifteen minutes daily of practising two malas of mantra in the state of meditation – no husband, no wife, no friend, no child, no body, no mind, no good, no bad, no brother, no sister, no conflict, no peace, just the pure luminous Self. That mantra can be chanted by others as well, no problem. You do not have to mention that what you are chanting is your initiation mantra, “My guru gave me the mantra of *Om Namah Shivaya*.” If you sing it, it does not demean it. If you write it, it does not demean it, and when you practise it, it helps you.

Three ways of chanting

One word of caution. When you practise mantra as sadhana, the mind becomes introverted and sleep comes. You have to remain awake, and the way to remain awake as prescribed in yoga is simple. There are three types of mantra repetition: *manasika* or mental, which is considered to be the highest form of mantra meditation; *upanshu* or whispering, where you move your lips but no sound comes, and *vaikhari* or audible repetition, saying it aloud.

If you feel that you are getting a little bit sleepy while doing the mantra meditation then begin to whisper the mantra, but if the desire to sleep becomes heavier, begin to say the mantra aloud. From the mental repetition of mantra, simply move the lips, and if you still feel a bit sleepy, you can begin to speak the mantra. Just make it audible only to yourself. These three forms of chanting the mantra can be adopted depending on how you feel, what you feel, and when you feel like chanting.

THE DISCIPLE

What are the qualities of a good disciple? What would make someone successful on that path and journey?

Discipleship becomes more meaningful when you are able to improve yourself. You know the model of the SWAN principle? If you work with your strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs, your S-W-A-N, and you improve yourself, that improved nature will make you a better disciple. What creates the ground of discipleship is the understanding and belief that can exist between the student and the teacher, the disciple and the master. The trust, understanding and belief that exists between guru and disciple builds the foundation of discipleship. Some people believe a little bit, some people believe too much, and discipleship is based on that expression.

Do you know the story of Padmapada? Sri Shankaracharya once had a cook who would cook for him whenever

he was travelling around the country. One day they camped near a river. Shankaracharya was on one shore and the cook was on the other when Shankaracharya called out to him, “Come quickly!” According to the story, the cook ran across the water and as he ran, wherever his steps fell, a lotus came up to support him. When he reached the other side Shankaracharya said to him, “From today you are to be known as *Padmapada* or ‘lotus foot’.” He became one of the acharyas of the Shankaracharya tradition. This story indicates what I am trying to bring to your notice.

When the call comes from the guru, the disciple guides himself to the fulfilment of that call and not to fantasy, as happens in many peoples’ lives. That level of one-pointed awareness of the guru also brings out many inherent qualities and powers from inside. These people I am talking about are historical figures, they are not mythological figures, and it has happened in the lives of many people. Therefore the foundation of discipleship is trust, conviction and faith. This comes from understanding, and the development of discipleship happens as you become more *gurumukhi*, focused towards the guru, inspiration and source.

There is no direct answer as to which qualities are important for a disciple or which qualities one should cultivate as a disciple. If anybody gives any particular answer they are mistaken, for different components are used to launch oneself through this process of self-improvement. The foundation of this process is one thing: making yourself more capable of understanding the ideas and living the concepts of discipleship. One has to go through screening, and for that there is the SWAN model. One has to cultivate one’s strengths, refine one’s ambitions and differentiate between the appropriate and the inappropriate. Many things are involved and one has to work at many levels.

—14–15 December 2006

2007

INTRODUCING THE GURUKUL LIFESTYLE TO COURSE PARTICIPANTS

If one wishes to change the quality of experience in life one has to be ready to make some sacrifices. One sacrifices the usual way of life that one would choose to live. One has to move from comfort and luxury to simplicity, from a life based on cravings and desires to a life based on need, from a life of security to a life of full participation and involvement.

To make this transition as smooth as possible one needs to have an open mind, because it is not an easy thing to do. In the process of transition one has to confront the six parameters or boundaries of the mind. It is not until these mental barriers are brought down that the actual transformation of the personality takes place. This transformation becomes a turning point in life. Until the experience of yoga begins, one needs to have an open mind to imbibe the lifestyle, and one must also be committed to the quest of yoga. The environment created in gurukul life ensures that regardless of whether you study yoga, or do asana and pranayama in the morning or in the evening, the application of yoga in life happens naturally and spontaneously.

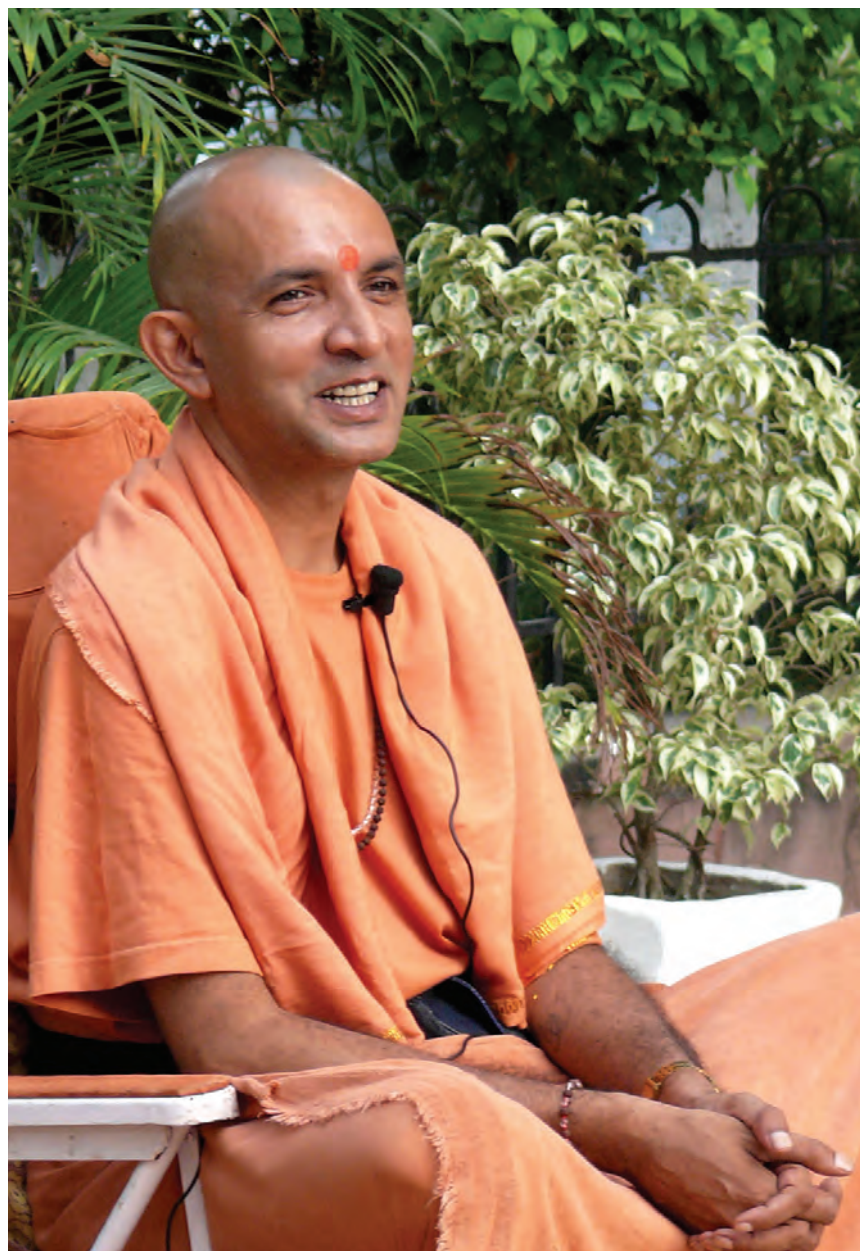




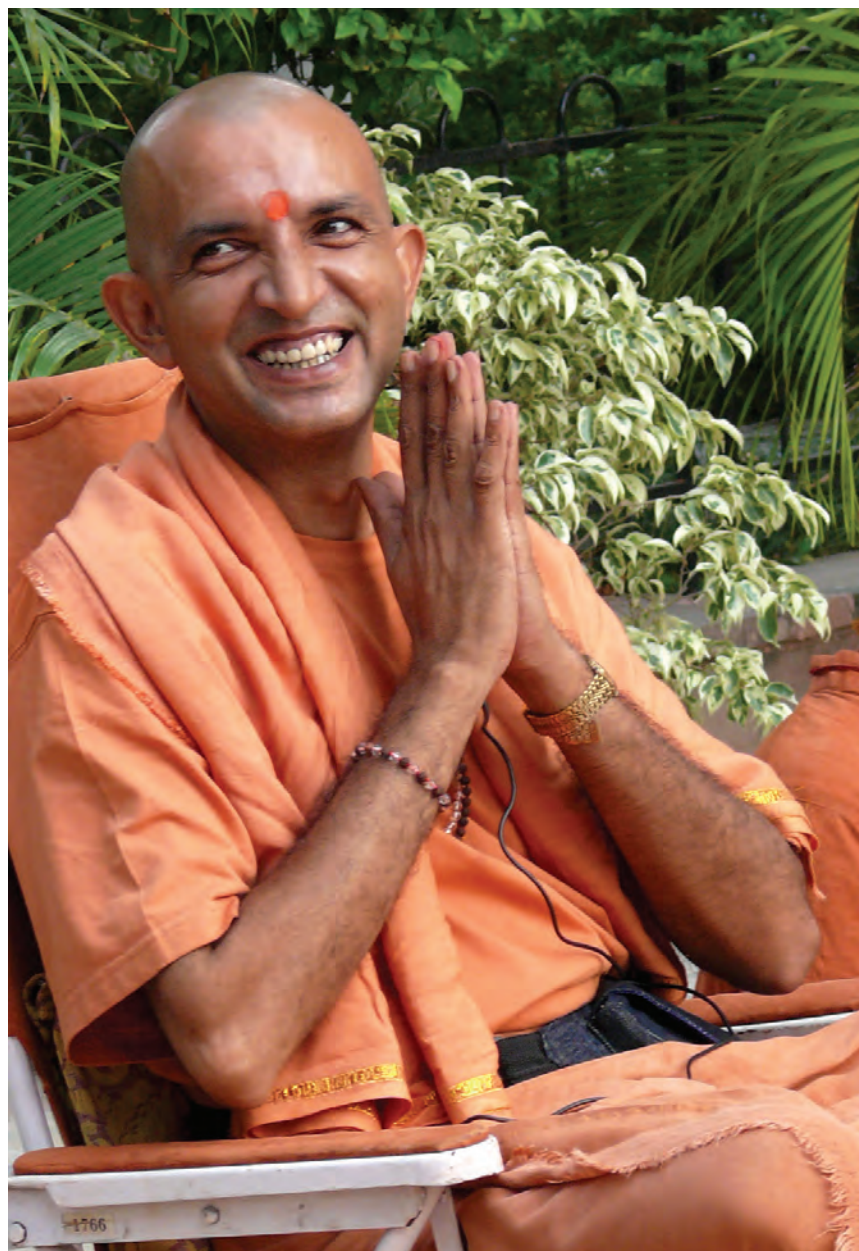












Discipline

What is yoga? Many scholars, scientists and sages throughout the ages have given it a lot of thought, and they have written many theses on the subject. However, if you go down to the yogic texts, you will find that the opening statement is, “Yoga is a process of discipline.” ‘Discipline’ here does not mean the discipline that you know of as externally imposed rules and regulations. The word used in Sanskrit is *anushasana*, which means ‘to rule and govern the subtle aspect of personality’.

Every effort that you make in order to gain a deeper understanding of yourself, and guide your efforts constructively, is an act of *anushasana*. *Anushasana* is a self-motivated drive to attain perfection in life. This effort is not only a personal effort, it also implies learning how to interact harmoniously with others. Attainment of *anushasana* represents a state of maturity and a state of wisdom in life. Just as one has to first tune the radio and adjust to a particular frequency that will transmit the desired station, one has to undergo a process of tuning the mind if one wants to become a good receptor of higher frequencies that can enhance, enrich and nourish the quality of life. *Anushasana* is only the beginning, but it is only through the attainment of *anushasana* that one can develop an awareness of the infinite possibilities which lie ahead.

Seva

Besides *anushasana*, another important component of the gurukul life is *seva*. *Seva* is an act of selfless service that one does without any personal motive or gratification. It is an important component because everything you do in life is self-oriented. Even the relations you have with others are self-oriented. At some level or another, every relation which you have is some form of self-gratification, whether that be physical pleasure, mental entertainment or emotional security. However, in *seva* the self-oriented aspect vanishes and one works selflessly without gaining anything in return.

This in turn purifies one's heart and gives one a broader perspective in life where one recognizes and begins to feel the pains of others and starts to experience the joy of others.

Seva eventually becomes an attitude in life, and this attitude creates a shelter in which countless people can find support, nourishment, inspiration and upliftment. After all, what is the point in practising yoga if it cannot create a deeper connection with other people, and if it is going to be for self-development only? In this way, seva is an important component of the gurukul life.

Therefore, those who wish to make the most of their stay at Ganga Darshan will have to keep these points clearly in mind. Be here with an open mind and drop your expectations. Become a good receptor of the inspiration that can guide your life towards harmony, happiness and joy by tuning yourself to the frequency of the gurukul. If you can do this much, everything else will happen automatically because this land has been blessed by great sages of our history and the energies in which the gurukul is immersed are conducive to self-transformation. The river Ganga, representing purity, flows constantly and removes any residue of impurity. All you need to do is make sure that you are flowing with the current. Only then will yoga become a living experience of every moment in your life, and only then will the aim of Bihar Yoga Bharati be fulfilled.

—January 2007

We know all about Sri Swamiji, his life, his mission and his stories, but when we come to think about it, we know little about your direction and your sankalpa.

My New Year's Day is my sannyasa day. Not on the first of January, but the day I took sannyasa. That is the beginning of my new year, because that was the beginning of my life and that was the birth that I had. If at all I have a sankalpa in my life, it is only one. Sri Swamiji and Swami Sivananda are the luminaries of our tradition, and just because I have

been declared Sri Swamiji's successor does not mean that I have become a luminary as well. Closeness, position or power is not an indication of one's attainment. Rather the sadhana that one does to become better in life is the parameter which decides how great one is or how advanced one is.

When I was appointed successor to Sri Swamiji, I thought about it: 'What is the meaning of succession? Is it becoming the in-charge of a property? Is it taking control of the finances? Is it directing people and ashrams around the world? Is it putting on a label that I have succeeded somebody?' Anybody can manage the ashram – paid or unpaid, sannyasin or householder. Is it the presidentship that makes me his successor? No.

What then do I have to succeed in, or follow him in? His sadhana, his tapasya, his renunciation, his conviction, faith and determination. These are the things that I must imbibe in order to qualify myself as a successor to Swami Satyananda. Not the position of presidency of the International Yoga Fellowship, not the pomp and splendour that one can create. The only way to succeed properly is to become the right type of sannyasin. After all, what is the direction of my life? Is it just to be here as manager and administrator of an ashram? Is this how I am going to pass my life until the end of my days, just sitting here lecturing about yoga, Vedanta, tantra, and Samkhya, about the Upanishads, about social life, about this and that, day in and day out? No. When I came, my aim was sannyasa. What my guru gave me was sannyasa, and what I need to excel in is sannyasa.

Real sannyasa

A sannyasin's life is solitary. Associating with you is like associating with people in the waiting room of a train station. People come, some are here for four months, some are here for four years and some are here for forty years, but beyond that there is no other association. Where is my real association? My real association, which is continuous

and unbroken, is not with you. If your visa expires, you will go back. If you go into a head-trip, you will leave the ashram. If you dislike some rule, some discipline, some person, you will reject the place. You are not here because of sannyasa.

Few people in the world who join the various *paramparas*, traditions, are there to live sannyasa. Most people join because of the community. They identify with the community, not with the ideal of sannyasa. One does not become a sannyasin by wearing geru. By studying the *Prasthanatraya*, the three texts which form the very basis of Vedanta: the *Brahma Sutras*, the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*, one does not become a sannyasin. You can become an intellectual, you can become an exponent, but that is not the indication of having lived like a sannyasin.

Flexibility and endurance

Today you love each other and tomorrow you hate each other. Today you associate and identify with each other, but how long will this identification last? Four months? Four years? Forty years? At a maximum, it will be forty years. Thousands have come and gone. If I look at those people who have been together in the last forty years, out of thousands that have come, there are only four, five or six people remaining. What happened to all the rest who had the zeal of sannyasa and who took sannyasa? When they could not handle the disciplines of sannyasa and when they could not handle the hardships of sannyasa, they left, simple as that.

The one and only sankalpa that I have had in my mind right from the beginning was to be a proper sannyasin. This proper sannyasin is the one who is dear to God. Swami Sivananda was like that, and Swami Satyananda is like that, a proper sannyasin. Those who do not think of themselves but who have a broader perspective and a better vision about everyone and everything in life are called *rishis*. Those who can see, those who can develop the vision, who can chart a

new path and give a clear direction, they are the rishis. Of course, I consider myself to be one of the luckiest persons living on this planet. I have lived a charmed life, having guru's protection all my life and no problems anywhere in life: no sickness, no hernia, no diabetes, no blood pressure problems until today. The love and affection that I have received from my guru has made me feel very special. That is something that I cherish and hold dear.

Those people who think, 'Oh, we are going to live with Swamiji!' Well, they are mistaken, let me tell you, because there is no such thing as living with Swamiji. You see, if one has to make a chair out of bamboo, the bamboo should be able to bend. If the bamboo is not bent, no furniture can be made from it, and that bamboo is rejected. In sannyasa one has to learn how to bend and sannyasa becomes complete in discipleship. One is always a disciple in life, never a guru. Guru never thinks of himself as a guru, but always as a disciple, because as a disciple that guru is always connected with his guru. Just as Swami Satyananda is connected to Swami Sivananda, I feel connected to Swami Satyananda. With this connection the disciple always has the guru in mind, and one becomes *gurumukhi*, facing the guru. When one is not aware of guru, one is *manamukhi*, facing the mind; 'I' become the centre. "I can't adjust to this person. I can't live with that person. I can't talk to that person. I can't do this." Why not? If after taking sannyasa you are still going to say, "I can't, I can't" then you are not a sannyasin. That adaptability, that flexibility and that serenity has to be inside.

Sannyasa is not a way of escaping, rather it is a way of fighting and transcending oneself. Fight with the negative in life, *Kama krodhascha lobhascha dehe tishthanti taskarah*, meaning fight with those negative qualities which dominate life now and make one tamasic and rajasic; transcend them, convert them. Sannyasa is a tough and difficult sadhana. It is not a lifestyle for 'me'. It is not coming and living for 'me'. It is not ashram living for 'me'.

A solitary path

If I get the instruction today, I will be out of this place in less than five minutes because I have no association and no attachment. What is the use of attaching myself to you? I am not going to gain anything from that. What has anybody given me until today? A hundred rupees, peanuts and cloth: all that is available in the market. Flowers from the ashram gardens, my own flowers are given to me! Tell me frankly, what has anyone given me? Love? No way. Trust. No. A relationship is always equal: give and take, fifty-fifty. If something is given for life, then that something has to be given for life. If something is given in a small measure, it has to be returned in equal measure. Not that you ask a boon of prosperity from *Bhagavan*, from God, and then give one laddoo to please him. You are asking this much and you are only giving this much. That is why there is poverty and confusion, and that is why there are crises in life.

As a sannyasin I walk a solitary path. There is nobody beside me, nobody around me, nobody in front of me, nobody behind me. The only things that exist are subtle footprints which guide me and indicate that some time back, somebody passed through this way. Beyond that there is no other indication. The footprints that I see are the footprints of Swami Sivananda, Ramana Maharshi, Maharishi Aurobindo, Shankaracharya, Swami Satyananda. I can see their footprints going into the distance towards infinity and disappearing. It is those footprints that I must follow. When I look around me as to who else is following such footprints, I do not find anybody, for everyone is too much caught up in their own friendships, associations and mental hang-ups. Sannyasa is a solitary path.

The next chapter

A time is coming when even I will be renouncing, and that time is not far off. Once I become free, I shall follow the sannyasa path for which I came to this life; meanwhile all this is only a way to exhaust karmas, samskaras. If I was doing

this same thing outside I would be doing it for ‘me’, but what I am doing here now is not being done for myself but for a mission, for a tradition, and once my chapter has been written, another chapter in the book must begin.

In the history of our parampara’s establishment in Munger, Swami Satyananda wrote the first chapter from 1963 to 1983. I joined the ashram at the age of four and was sent out as a yoga teacher by the age of eleven. Then in 1983, at the age of twenty-three, I was recalled back to the ashram by Sri Swamiji. When I took over I was the youngest sannyasin in India to take the reins of any institution. Sri Swamiji initiated me as paramahansa at the age of 30, and once again I was the youngest sannyasin to be declared one. What does all that mean today though? Nothing, because I know I am not yet fully qualified, because as Robert Frost says,

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have many miles to go before I sleep.

Do I stop to admire the beauty of the woods or do I continue with my journey? I have to continue with my journey. I have had my share of life here and now other people have to take over, for an institution is not guided by one person’s presence, but by the spirit of the vision and the mission which has to be kept alive from generation to generation.

Living sannyasa

If I can live sannyasa, then I can live all the aspirations and the vision of our parampara, our tradition. Therefore my only resolution in life has been to become a good sannyasin, and what are the qualities of a good sannyasin? They can be found in the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:13-14):

*Adveshthaa sarvabhootaanaam, maitrah karuna eva cha
Nirmamo nirahankarah samadukhasukhah kshamee,*

He who hates no creature, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from attachment and egoism, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving,

*Santushtah satatam yogee yataatma dridhanishchayah
Mayyarpitamanobuddhiryo madbhaktah sa me priyah.*

Ever content, steady in meditation, possessed of firm conviction, self-controlled, with mind and intellect dedicated to Me, he, My devotee, is dear to Me.

From time to time I think about the aim of my life, and I remind myself, ‘Do not get caught in pain or pleasure with an individual or with a community. If you are writing the last pages of your chapter, then you have to be on your own. Once you have written the last pages of this chapter, you are free to live sannyasa and aspire, in the real sense, to *tyaga*, renunciation; to *tapasya*, austerity; to *karuna*, compassion; and to *atmabhav*, oneness with all’.

The path of sannyasa is difficult. One cannot even handle an ill word that somebody says without becoming disturbed, yet one believes one can handle the awakening of kundalini and the awakening of the mind? That is the ultimate trial. Getting a degree is not difficult. You want to take sannyasa today, thinking that I will give you a degree that says you have become a sannyasin. Such a certificate has no meaning. Maybe for you there is meaning because you think, ‘I’ve become a member of a club’, but in reality sannyasa is a sadhana, a tapasya.

If I can go through that process of sadhana and tapasya and come out, then I will consider myself to be a sannyasin-in-the-making. So far, however, I have not even started the process. Whiling away my time, listening to the head-trips of people and trying to solve their problems is not sannyasa, nor the destiny of my life. Therefore, my resolution has always been only this: “God, grant me the strength to be a sannyasin in the sense and manner that my guru wants me to be.” When you pray, include this sentence in your prayers as well, ‘God, give a chance to Swami Niranjan to become a true sannyasin in his life.’ That is my resolution.

—2 January 2007

ON AWARENESS

In the absence of awareness yoga does not fructify in life. You can practise hatha yoga for forty years and you can practise meditation for forty years, but that is not yoga.

There is a beautiful statement by Swami Sivananda. Somebody asked him, "Can I go to the caves and practise my meditation in isolation, in silence?" Swami Sivananda said, "It is not necessary, because once you go to the cave, you will be spending your time sleeping and fantasizing, building castles in the air during meditation." This is a very appropriate and true response, because what would you do when you are alone with nothing to divert your mind, with nothing to extrovert your mind? You would be falling asleep in meditation, and when you sit to meditate, you would only be building castles in the air because there is nobody to guide you.

What has been your achievement until today? You cannot control your anger, you cannot control your moods, you cannot control your behaviour, you cannot control your expressions. Is that the outcome of meditation? You are negative, you are aggressive, you are violent, you are not at peace with yourself, and you are destructive to yourself. Therefore, meditation is not yoga, hatha yoga is not yoga, raja yoga is not yoga, karma yoga is not yoga, bhakti yoga is not yoga. The cultivation of awareness is yoga, the cultivation of wisdom along with awareness is yoga, and the cultivation of the appropriate qualities of life along with sadhana, qualities which can help you grow and develop, is yoga. The different yogas, whether hatha or raja or kriya or kundalini yoga, are only an aid to the development of this yogic awareness, nothing more than that. They are not the final aim.

Live yoga

You are yoga teachers only. You can say that you are a yoga teacher, but not that you are a yogi, for you have not experienced yoga. You have practised yoga, you have

taught the postures and techniques of yoga, but yoga is not embodied in you. It has to come to that point. Your real achievement in life is when you can imbibe yoga as awareness, as positive qualities flowering within you, as wisdom dawning and expressing itself through you.

What stops you from developing awareness in your life? Your habits and conditionings do, because they create barriers in the development of awareness. It is difficult to overcome a habit or a conditioning because you never give your attention to it. You are always trying to take and take, without trying to change yourself internally. Until you are able to clean the blackboard, to change your conditioning and habits, nothing can be written on it. Therefore, yoga initially has to become a method of cleaning the blackboard, not writing on top of what is already there. People want to write on the blackboard without wiping out anything because they are attached to what is there: sensuality, sensorial awareness, intellectual ideas, emotional expressions, beliefs – these are all conditionings. If they bind your mind, if they bind your personality, then how can there be an experience of freedom?

Undoing the knots

To experience freedom you have to release those bondages, you have to release those knots called ‘conditionings’ and ‘archetypes’, those *samskaras*. Therefore yoga has to become a way to improve the quality of the *samskaras*, not just a way to improve the quality of body, the quality of thinking, or the quality of meditation. It has to become a process through which you can improve the quality of the *samskaras* that you express in life. That is the practical yoga.

Meditation is not the answer; as you have not trained yourself to meditate. You think closing the eyes and visualizing something is meditation, or closing the eyes and concentrating on something is meditation; you think that meditation is internalization of mind, but no, it is not. Meditation is a state of mind. Just as passion or fear is a state of mind, meditation is a state of mind as well.

As generally practised, asanas are also irrelevant. Today you have an ache in your knee, tomorrow you have ache in your shoulder. After all, the body will follow its own dharma and if you practise today to remove the pain in your knee and tomorrow to remove the pain in your shoulder, then the entire focus of asana becomes physical, reduced to stretching to feel good. When I travel, I see those aerobic exercises on TV, with music and dance, passing for yoga. What is actually happening to the body at that time? You move the body, loosen it, and feel energetic for a while –that’s all right too, but beyond that, what? In the *Yoga Sutras*, comfort and stillness is defined as asana. That comfort and stillness is not only physical, but it is psychological and spiritual as well. It is multidimensional. Asana has to lead you to that multidimensional level of comfort, stability and stillness which includes the mind, the emotions, the human psyche and the expressions of the human psyche. In our tradition we do not consider asanas to be physical at all. There are many yoga teachers who read from a book, gather ten people and become a ‘Master’. I call those people the ‘uneducated’ yoga teachers, because an educated yoga teacher will teach hatha yoga in a totally different way: not for stretching the body, but as a process of experiencing the subtle dimensions of the personality. Awareness plays an important role in this process.

Coming back to the last point, the attainment of awareness, wisdom, inner harmony and the appropriate samskara is the actual practice of yoga. If you have a headache you can take a pill that will help you remove the headache. Some people have a reaction to aspirin, so they need to find another medicine. Each body responds differently to each chemical. In the same manner, even in yoga each person responds according to their nature and attains a different level. Therefore it is important to find the right combination of yoga for oneself. Yoga is not a universal practice, it is very much a personal sadhana. One can learn some general practices in a class, but as sadhana one has

to have the right program, a proper program designed to overcome the limited conditioning and samskaras of the mind. These techniques, practised with awareness, give birth to insight and harmonious behaviour in life.

—23 March 2007

Swamiji, how do I concentrate on one God when Shiva has been given as a spiritual guru, Sri Devi as the maternal guru and I have you as the physical guru as well? Do I concentrate on the crystal Shivalingam that has been given for trataka or do I use some other form?

I do not understand this confusion or conflict about God, and I cannot figure out why people still fight over whether God is black or white, male or female, living in heaven or in the hearts of everyone or whether God is a judge or a lover. What I feel is that when you try to understand something that defies logic and rationality, then that understanding should also come from a dimension beyond logic or intellect. Everyone has their own connection and relationship with that energy called 'God', each one has their own experience. Whether I perceive God in the form of light, or in the form of an impersonal idea, or as Rama, Krishna, Devi, Sita or Kali, is just an expression of my connection with a quality representing the transcendental nature of the Divine.

It has been stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* and other scriptures as well that people who believe in a personal God and people who believe in an impersonal God experience God. The manifest forms of God are like the rungs of a ladder. In order to climb to the top of the house you need the help of a ladder, but once you have gone to the top, you have no further use for the ladder. In order to realize the transcendental and all-pervasive nature of the divine, and convert our non-transcendental mind to the transcendental mind, we have to go up the rungs of the ladder. Moving from one level to another is known as *sakara upasana*, developing an awareness of God with attributes, such as name and form.

Whether you focus on the image of Shiva, Rama or Krishna, whether you focus on the sun, moon or stars, whether you focus on a flower, a candle or any other object, or whether you focus on your own breath or heartbeat, all the points where you concentrate are *sakara* points, manifested points. They are not *nirakara* or invisible, unmanifest. So all these points that you experience in your own concentration are the sakara levels, the manifest dimensions of the mind. Let your intellect think about the omnipotence, the omnipresence and the omniscience of God, but in your practice connect with that which inspires you towards faith, positivity and strength in life. That is more important.

For this reason it is said that God cannot be realized through the intellect, discussion, debate, confusion or conflict. At one point you have to bypass your intellect which says, “This is like this, this is like that,” and just be. Just believe. When you do that then you are the real bhakta. *Santushtah satatam yogi yatatma drdha nishcayah, Mayi apritamanobuddhih yo madbhaktah sa me priyah* – “Ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, possessed of firm conviction, with the mind and intellect dedicated to Me, he, My devotee, is dear to Me.” (*Bhagavad Gita* 12:14)

—4 April 2007

MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE MIND

Swamiji, what is the mind? You say that to control the mind we should make friends with it, but to make friends there has to be something we should get in return, so what is that? How do we make friends with the mind?

It is true that rather than fight the mind you have to become a friend to the mind. Most people say, “Fight and subdue the mind,” but here we say, “No, do not fight,” for in this fight with the mind it is the person who is the loser, not the mind. In your life the mind is the master and your aspirations are the slave. The mind says, “This is a nice place,” therefore

you also say, “It is a nice place.” The mind says, “Not a nice place,” so you also decide that it is not a nice place. The mind is continuously dictating the terms.

Four powerful components of the mind

The mind is composed of four different components: ego or *ahamkara*; memory or *chitta*; rationality, logic or *buddhi*; and reflection, brooding and thinking which is *manas*. These are the four aspects of mind, and in order to manage them you have to be careful and delicate as to how you approach the mind. *Manas*, the brooding aspect, is an expression of mind. If somebody hates you, you begin to brood upon that; if somebody likes you, you begin to brood upon that. If somebody looks at you or does not look at you, if you are successful or miserable, you brood upon that. This brooding is just one aspect of mind, but can anyone control it?

If you cannot control the basic brooding, how can you control the influences of *chitta*, the memories? They are also powerful. It is the influence of memory that makes a person your enemy, or your friend, or your passionate lover – that makes a person into anything. You live that relationship with that person for years and years, and it is just a relationship that a memory has triggered in you. Ego and intellect I do not have to describe, because everyone is the living example of the use, abuse and misuse of the intellect. Ego is something else, but how can one manage the ego?

On one side stand the four powerful generals of *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara* and on the other is you, the single foot-soldier with a tiddly little sword in your hand, trying to subdue the mind. The four generals are standing there saying, “Ok, come on!” and you, a puny little creature are waving a small sword at them saying, “Look out, I am going to subdue you!” It is wise that you become a friend to the four generals, though it is not that easy. Meditation is not that easy. You close your eyes and start building castles in the air and say, “Wow, I am spiritually enlightened.” That is what people do; they hypnotize themselves into seeing angels,

lights and gods and think they have become realized when they have not. The funny thing is that even in that stage they begin to brood upon what they have experienced. They go back to square one, and go through the expression of anger, hatred, aggressive and hypocritical behaviour, the 'holier than thou' attitude.

For this reason, in the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri Krishna says to Arjuna, "Look, it is not possible to control the mind. All you can do is to gradually withdraw the mind from those areas where it becomes highly active and agitated." In our association with the world there are areas where the mind becomes highly involved and agitated. If somebody happens to abuse you, you become highly involved and get agitated. Nobody can take any abuse with calmness of mind, but if you can disconnect the mind from that intense involvement then, according to Sri Krishna, you will be able to experience some peace.

How to control, how to subdue and how to transcend the mind? When you get an idea about how to transcend the mind, that idea is coming from the mind itself; how can the mind control itself? If it was easy it should have happened by now, but it has not happened in thirty years. It has not happened in forty years. It has not happened in seventy or eighty years, so what is the secret? The answer is simple. You have two minds.

The bhokta and the drashta

Do you know what people say when they are undecided? "I am in two minds about it." You have to mind these two minds. One mind is known as the *bhokta*, the mind engrossed in the sensorial experience, the mind engrossed in the outer bodily experience, the mind that enjoys. This is the most predominant state for the active mind, the part that gets highly involved with the world around it. There is another dimension, another layer of the mind that is not as active or predominant, but nevertheless it is there, and that is known as the *drashta*. *Drashta* means 'to witness without

involvement, without participation', and it is there as one small compartment in the greater room called the mind.

The yogic, tantric and vedic thoughts indicate that in spiritual life it is the drashta which has to be tapped. A clear indication of this is given in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. In order to control the modifications of mind you have to become a drashta, in order to realize your own nature you have to become a drashta. Be the non-involved witness. Just as you witness a game going on and enjoy it, you do not have to be there physically playing the game, you can also enjoy the game from a distance. After all, the crowd in a stadium is not playing the game, they are enjoying the game. They are the drashtas, the witnesses. Drashta does not mean a state devoid of enjoyment, only that the quality of enjoyment becomes different. Whether it is superior or inferior is up to you to decide, but the point is that the quality is different.

The confused mind is the interactive mind, the bhokta mind, interactive with the world. The drashta mind is what I call the spiritual mind, where you become the drashta, the observer of yourself. The mistake that people make in trying to transcend their idiosyncrasies and their mental behaviours is that they come into conflict with this interactive mind while it is engaged in the events taking place. Therefore mental fatigue and further tensions and mental confusions come up. However, the same situation will become different if you perceive it from the drashta mind. Do you know the statement, 'Do not make a mountain out of a molehill'? A tiny molehill becomes a mountain when you are involved in the interactive mind, whereas a mountain can become a molehill, easily crossed, when you establish yourself in the drashta mind. Therefore when you decide to transform or transcend your mind, do not fight with the interactive mind – you do not have to change the interactive mind at all, you just have to develop the drashta component more and more. Then there is no struggle.

There is no need to conquer the mind. If you try to do that it will be a lifelong war that you will fight with yourself.

No scripture or tradition has spoken about dominating the mind. They only speak about finding a way through the maze of the mind without entangling oneself with it. This is one point in the fine print that very few people read: you have to find your way through the maze of the mind. Your awareness and your conviction are your representatives to help you find your way through the maze. If awareness and conviction are there, you can be a friend to your mind. However, if you lack awareness and conviction, the mind will easily sway you and divert you, and you become lost.

Yoga has given a clear map for this maze in the first three sutras of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*:

Atha yogaanushaasanam.

Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah.

Tadaa drashtuh svaroope avasthaanam.

Yoga is a form of discipline.

With this discipline one can modify the behaviour of the mind.

Then one will realize one's true nature.

Through discipline, *anushasana*, and control of the modifications, *vrittis*, you can become a drashta, a witness, and not be swayed by the modifications and the influences of those modifications. Therefore, anybody who wants to control the mind should come towards the drashta dimension of life.

—4–9 April 2007

When Arjuna was asked to aim at the bird's eye and describe what he was seeing he replied, "I see the eye of the bird." So does that mean that he was not aware of other things, that his awareness was limited? Please tell us in detail what is one-pointed concentration, *trataka*, and awareness.

What is the meaning of concentration? What is the meaning of being one-pointed? You have to define that first. If you are

asked to look at something, and then you are asked, “What are you seeing?” what answer is expected? The answer that is expected is: “I’m seeing what you told me to see.” However if you do not give this answer and you give something else, what does this mean? It means that you are not focused.

That happened to the disciples of Guru Dronacharya. He placed a clay bird on top of a branch and told his archery students to shoot at the eye of the bird. That was the instruction, ‘You have to shoot at the eye of the bird’. Then he called one of them, gave him the bow and arrow and asked, “What do you see?” The student said, “I see the tree, I see the branch, I see the leaves, I see the flowers, I see the fruits, I see the birds, I see . . .” That was not the answer that Dronacharya was expecting. He said, “You have failed. Get out.” Clearly, that student had not listened to what he was saying, but was making up his own collection of images around the image that Dronacharya had specified. Only Arjuna said, “I see nothing but the eye.” He could see everything, but his mind was only looking at the eye. He gave the right answer and Dronacharya said, “You are the winner.” There is no need even to shoot the arrow; when the answer is right. Also, if the answer is wrong, there is no need to shoot the arrow.

The point is that concentration means an unwavering mind. Imagine that you are sitting on one side of the road, and in a shop on the opposite side there is some item that you are looking at. You are totally focused on that item. People pass, cars and rickshaws go by, animals go by and you see them, but do you acknowledge them? No, because your attention is on the object that you desire. You see all these things passing, but there is no conscious acknowledgment of them. Later on, if somebody asks you, “Did you see that thing crossing there?” you will answer, “No. I wasn’t looking there, I was focusing on something.” That is one level of concentration. If you are aware of everything that is happening, that is not concentration, because then you are not aware of the actual thing on which you need to concentrate; you are not focused or one-pointed.

Concentration means holding the area of attention fixed in your mind despite all the distractions or movements around it. That is what you are told to do in each and every type of meditation as well. Even in mantra meditation, when the mind fluctuates, you bring it back and you hold it on the mantra. It will go again, so you bring it back and hold it there. The instructions do not say that you should look at this thing and look at that thing, one after the other. You bring the focus back again and again until only that awareness remains and all else dissolves. You focus on the object of desire, and the same state is reflected inside in meditation.

—9 April 2007

Does rebirth exist?

The whole of humanity is divided into two, fifty-fifty. One half believes that incarnation or rebirth happens and the other half believes that it does not happen. Religions, intellectuals and thinkers are divided on this topic; some believe that rebirth can happen while others believe that it does not happen. You have heard all the arguments before, both against and in favour of rebirth, so my telling you whether it happens or not will not make any difference to you. Maybe it happens and maybe it does not happen. What I would like to look at however are the drawbacks and merits of deciding that it happens or that it does not happen.

Let us say it does not happen. What are the merits and demerits of rebirth not happening? Think about that. If you believe that rebirth does not happen, then this is the only life you live. In infinite time, this is the one time when you appear, like a flash, and then disappear again. Therefore, in this life it might be better just to enjoy it; earn money, take loans, enjoy the good life and then die, because you are not accountable to anything or anyone and nobody is going to bug you after you die. This non-believing attitude gives birth to an aggressive, materialistic mentality which is known in

India as the Charvaka philosophy which accepts only that which one can see as valid. The merit in this idea is, 'Enjoy this life and that's it, nothing more to it'. The demerit is the aggressive, materialistic tendency, which gives rise to the negative traits of personality: anger, possessiveness, hatred, the search for power. It distances you from the balancing and positive qualities of life such as sympathy, compassion and affection. The mind and heart become hard and you live for yourself instead of living the life of a human being.

Now let us suppose that reincarnation happens. I see the belief that one's consciousness is continually evolving as the check and control of life. If rebirth did not happen, if you only had one life to live and that was it, there would be no evolution. Time would stand still if there was no rebirth. Evolution is perceived as the changes that you observe in consciousness, and consciousness is an ongoing process.

The DNA of consciousness

Look at the DNA helix for example. Is the information contained in the DNA helix acquired in one lifetime only, or is there something at the physical level that has come with you through all the generations? Genetic information has come down through all the generations of parents to you: their memories, their knowledge, their understanding, their impressions and their samskaras. If this is happening at the physical level, just imagine the mental DNA helix. Imagine the DNA helix of consciousness, which goes back into infinity. This continuity is the evolution of consciousness that everybody speaks about. The body may not be the same, but the substance, the inner substance will continue.

The seed you plant today will break its shell in the course of time. A soft sprout will push itself through the hard shell, through the soil, through the hard ground, until it pops up above ground and grows into a bush, a small tree or a big tree. Then it grows flowers and fruit, and inside the fruit you will again find the same seed. In this case the seed has reincarnated as the seed again. It has undergone

a metamorphosis into a tree, but has been reborn as a seed. This seed that has been reborn will have the same potential as the original seed even five generations or ten generations down the line. It has multiplied into thousands, and each of those thousands of seeds will have the same potential. If one seed improves, then the quality of the subsequent seeds will also improve.

Similarly, if one brain improves, the quality of subsequent brains will improve. If one mind improves, subsequent minds will be of a better quality. If one's emotions improve, subsequent manifestations will be of the same improved quality. Therefore evolution is refinement and improvement; if one believes in evolution, one should acknowledge that rebirth has a role to play in the greater scheme of events.

Ideas or thoughts on whether reincarnation happens or does not happen are intellectual proceedings. However, consideration should be given to the role of believing in rebirth as an aid to the process of evolution and the growth of consciousness. If you know that you are going to be around tomorrow, you will improve your behaviour today and you will become better. However, if you know that you are not going to be here tomorrow, you can do anything you wish under the sun, sure that you will rest in peace, unaffected by your present behaviour. That is my understanding, and from my perspective I can see that belief in rebirth has a valid role to play in our lives and should not remain an intellectual, philosophical or religious debate.

—23 April 2007

What is the best way to discipline oneself? Does the discipline of an institution reduce one's common sense?

First, let me ask you one thing. What do you mean by discipline? Is it an imposed rule which you have to follow such as not talking after 6 pm or before 6 am? Eating food on time, is that discipline? Waking up at four in the morning and getting ready for classes, is that discipline? What about

someone asking you to pick up a broom and do karma yoga? Is discipline a regulated lifestyle or an imposed rule which burdens you? Before asking me this question, you should define what you mean by discipline.

Discipline as inner freedom

According to the yogic belief, discipline is anushasana. If you understand the meaning of the word ‘anushasana’ then you will know the direction in which discipline takes you. *Shasan* means to govern, to rule; and *anu* here means the atomic, the subtle aspect, so *anushasana* is complete control over the subtle aspects. Therefore, one who is able to control the reactions and expressions of the subtle nature and behaviour of the personality is one who is disciplined. One who can control the mind and the instinctive responses is considered to be disciplined. In order to make you aware of the subtle processes, certain outside factors have to play a role in your life.

Take the example of mouna as an anushasana. You are told to keep silence from 6 pm to 6 am: twelve hours. This bugs you because you feel that your right of free speech is being restricted. People have become so aware of what they want to do, and how no one should tell them what to do, that even small things bug people. This is a simple little thing. After all, for how long are you actually not going to speak? Half of that time you spend sleeping anyway, and in the morning you are so bleary-eyed and sleepy that you cannot even open your eyes, so why are you planning to open your mouth before you have become fully extroverted? In reality, the practice of mouna is only two hours, between 6 pm to 8 pm, that is all, but when it is said ‘6 pm to 6 am’, this leads to a mental reaction: “What? We can’t speak for twelve hours?”

That mental reaction indicates that you are not disciplined, not only in the ashram, but at home as well. Even at home, where only two grown-ups and two young ones live, are you disciplined? You don’t wash your own clothes, you get some servant to do it. You feel it is beneath your self-

image and prestige to pick up a broom to clean the house, and you talk of discipline? It is absolute nonsense.

The purpose of discipline is to train the mind to become free from negative reactions, to find peace and tranquillity by re-educating the mind. Therefore, discipline is a way to freedom; it is not a way to restriction. By learning how to control and govern the subtle and unconscious reactions and responses of mind, feelings, emotions and body, discipline becomes a way to freedom. Therefore, one's routine plays an important role as an external factor to make one aware of what is happening internally. Discipline is the beginning of yoga, not because it binds one in restrictions, but because it frees one from mental inhibitions, complexes, negative outlooks on life, and from a negative self-image. That is point one.

Applying common sense

The second question was, 'Does discipline in an institution reduce common sense?' First tell me this: when have you had common sense? Common sense is the only commodity which is not common. What you have lived all of your lives is 'common non sense'. Common sense is sense that is connected to *dharma*, to the righteous path, and to *nyaya*, justice or the real and correct logical way. When you do not deviate from the path of *nyaya* and when you do not deviate from the path of *dharma*, that is common sense, but that is uncommon at present. You all live the common nonsense, and it is for this reason that you face struggles and strife, both internal and external: problems, difficulties, frustrations, tensions and momentary joys and happiness. When you have never applied common sense in your own life, how can you now speak of common sense? I hope I am not being too blunt, but this is the truth, this is the reality.

When you fight with your neighbour, or when you are frustrated with your work and your colleagues, where is your common sense? When you are thinking about the manners of your children, where is your common sense then? When you

are trying to defend yourself from allegations and abuses, where is your common sense at that time? If there was any common sense in life, you would not be making the mistakes that bring suffering and confusion into your life.

Institutional discipline does not take away common sense, rather it cultivates it. The groundwork, the cultivation of common sense, happens through anushasana. Just as one has to clear all the weeds and stones and prepare the ground to plant seeds, you have to treat your life in the same manner. Prepare the ground of the mind and plant the right seeds; that is common sense.

The systems, approach, routine, disciplines, morals, and ideals that are followed by any organization or family institution are only guidelines to improve common sense within your own life. Once you have understood these guidelines, you are free; you do not need instruction, you do not need a teacher, you do not need a guru and you do not need any institution because you have graduated. After all, you go through a school, ten or twelve levels, and then into higher studies. There you go through a process of maturity of the intellect. Just as in an outer school you go through a process of intellectual development and maturity, in an ashram you go through a process of inner development and maturity, which comes in the course of time. Problems come when you try to bring outside ideas, concepts and thoughts into a different environment and you begin to compare the two. That is not possible because they are opposites.

Selfish and selfless

During the day when the sun is shining you can see the world and the colours around you. At night, when there is no light, all the colours disappear into the darkness. The only way you can see colour at night is by giving light to the object. In the same manner, the values which govern the social and material life of an individual are the reverse of the values that govern spiritual development and awakening. If the outside material world is self-oriented or selfish,

the inner world is the opposite; not oriented to one's own benefit alone, it is selfless. If at the material level you are thinking about improving yourself, at the spiritual level you are thinking about helping other people. There you are looking towards yourself and here you are looking away from yourself. Therefore the ideals, the mentality, the thinking and philosophy become different and you cannot compare the two. Everyone tries to make the materialistic philosophy and the spiritual philosophy compatible, but in reality they are not compatible, because the material philosophy forces you to look at your needs and your successes in life, whereas in spiritual philosophy you are taught to look at others and to help others succeed in their life regardless of the failures in your own life. That holds true in any spiritual teaching.

A teacher who teaches physics, math or science in school remains a teacher for life, but after learning the subject, the student can become a famous person. He can become an Einstein, a Newton, anybody. How? By using and applying, in the right manner, the teaching that he has gained from his teacher. Today everybody talks about Einstein and other great scientists, but nobody even thinks of the teachers who put a lot of effort into creating them. This happens when you identify with your successes, with what you have become, and lose your connection with the inspirations of learning. When learning stops in life, the ego becomes rigid. It is that ego, having the attitude of 'I know it all', that creates the blocks against common sense and discipline. After all, in these cases you are listening to your own ego.

The process of learning is different. If you find difficulties and restrictions it is due to the ego, not the learning. If you find it difficult to follow an anushasana, a discipline, that difficulty is due to the ego. Today you are facing a difficulty, yet thousands of others have faced the same situation without difficulty. How come you are the one facing that difficulty today? In some part of your mind, of your nature, of your ego, you have blocked the learning aspect, the imbibing aspect. Is the emergence of the 'I know it all' arrogance or

ego an indication of common sense in your life? No. It is not an indication of common sense.

Systems provide a way. After all, whether it is one lane, two lanes or three lanes, a road is there and you have to follow the road. If by using your so-called 'common sense' you decide not to go on the road but to use the ditch by the side of the road instead, you are going to have an accident with the help of your 'common sense'. If instead you know that you have to follow the road, you will reach your destination one day. It is as simple as that. Once you know what dharma is, what nyaya is, you do not make any mistakes in life. That is the true common sense. In the absence of this common sense, every day you keep on creating problems and difficulties and strife.

—7 August 2007

Is the aim of my life, with respect to spirituality, already destined? If so, is there any worth in putting extra effort into spiritual sadhana?

I believe, and this comes with the understanding of spiritual traditions, that spirituality is an integrated part of human life. The aim of humanity is the attainment of the spiritual enlightenment; the pursuit of material wealth is only passing the time, that is all.

Earth and human life is a station. When you are travelling you go to the airport, the railway station or the bus stand, and if your plane, train or bus is not there, what do you do? You wander around having cups of tea and coffee, reading newspapers and magazines, and then when your call comes you get on the train, you get on the plane, you get on the bus and you leave. Similarly, the real destiny of everyone is spiritual enlightenment and the cultivation of spiritual awareness. Until you find your path, until a call comes that makes you aware of your desires and the path available, you are only passing your time in life. All the spiritual and religious traditions have mentioned this fact, and this idea is ingrained in the scriptures as well.

The four purusharthas

While we live the material life we have to prosper in the spiritual life as well. Just as you seek prosperity in the material, at the same time you need to seek prosperity in the spiritual as well. How do you attain prosperity in the material realm? By adhering to the precepts of *artha*, wealth and prosperity, and *kama*, sensual enjoyment. How do you attain prosperity in the spiritual life? By adhering to the principles of *dharma*, righteousness, and *moksha*, liberation. In the spiritual tradition these are the four *purusharthas* or efforts that everyone needs to undertake in the course of their life. Just as you use the tools of *artha* and *kama* to prosper in the material life and have the best development in your material life, in the same manner, the precepts of *dharma* and *moksha* are used to develop spiritual awareness and spiritual understanding.

Faith and effort

While you are studying you decide that you will become a doctor or an engineer in the future. You become that through your studies and through your hard effort. You remain a doctor, an engineer or a scientist for the rest of your life, living and working in whatever profession. That becomes your destiny. That becomes your faith. Did you not work for it? Why then are you asking the question, “Do we need to work for spiritual attainment?” You put in effort to become a doctor, you put in effort to become a scientist, you put in effort to excel at whatever you are doing and you continue to do so. Why question whether effort has to be made in spiritual life or not? Of course there has to be effort, and if you have any doubts, then I feel that your understanding of spiritual life is not clear.

Say I am feeling hungry and I know that my destiny is to fill my stomach, but I do not do anything; I just sit there waiting for my stomach to get filled. What kind of logic is this? If you want to satisfy yourself by eating food, you have to buy the food. You need to have the hunger which makes

you buy the food, then you need to cook the food and then you need to eat the food. You also need to digest the food; just eating is not good enough, you have to digest it also. If you do not digest it, it will come out one day or another in its original form. In the same manner, spiritual life is a process.

Spiritual life is the process in which you excel and establish yourself through sadhana, through effort. When you became a doctor, you did not say “Faith is making me a doctor,” you worked for it. So why think in spiritual life, “If it is my destiny, why do I have to work for it when it will happen anyway?” If it is destiny that you will become a doctor, why do you need to go to school or college or be trained? Just sit at home right from birth and see whether you become a doctor or not. Intention and effort are both needed because it is the coming together of these two that gives you success in life. Intention may be there, but if there is no effort, there will be no success. Effort may be there, but if intention is not guiding it, there is no success. However, when these two come together there is success in the end.

Can one be one hundred percent selfless?

No, not as long as you are in this body, and not as long as you use the instrument of the mind with which you were born. You cannot be one hundred percent selfless because it is not the nature of the body or the nature of the mind to be one hundred percent selfless. One can be selfless up to a certain extent, there is no question about that. Some people may be eighty percent selfish and twenty percent selfless, some sixty percent selfish and forty percent selfless, others forty percent selfish and sixty percent selfless, or twenty percent selfish and eighty percent selfless. There is no such thing as one hundred percent selfless or one hundred percent selfish, because without the support of one, the other cannot exist. A selfless nature is supported by a selfish nature and a selfish nature is supported by a selfless nature. They complement each other.

Aim for balance

There has to be a balance, and the scriptures have defined that, too: spend fifty percent of your time to attain artha and kama, and fifty percent of your time to attain dharma and moksha. In vedic times, even the progression of this in life has been classified. Brahmacharya and grihastha ashrama are your time in the material world; vanaprastha and sannyasa ashrama represent your time in the spiritual world with its philosophical and mystical pursuits. Therefore, do not even try to think about or attempt to be one hundred percent selfless, because nature, creation, this earth, the senses and this body and mind will not permit it. If you want to be one hundred percent selfless then you have to leave this creation, this body, this mind, these senses and everything that is created and merge with the divine Shakti. Only then can one become fully selfless.

The conditions and the nature of the body, the mind and our existence in life do not permit extremism. Rather they encourage you to seek a balance to grow and prosper in the creative dimension as well as the invisible spiritual dimension.

Can marriage and spiritual life go hand-in-hand?

Of course they can. There is nothing wrong with marriage; it is a stepping-stone to spiritual life. In the scriptures every stage of life has been considered to be a stepping-stone to the inner and higher realization. Whether you get married and raise a family or you remain single, a *brahmachari*, is based on your needs and the attractions of the mind.

It is not necessary for everybody to marry. There are people who do not need marriage as a stepping stone to take them beyond. After all, you know the story of Shankaracharya, you know the story of Ramana Maharshi, you know the story of sadhus and sannyasins in history and even at present sitting in front of you. The samskaras of Shankaracharya were much higher than any samskara around today and he did not need to marry. The samskaras

of Vivekananda and of Ramana Maharshi were different, they did not need to marry, but then there are certain people who cannot do without marriage. One has to recognize the samskaras with which one comes, but most of the time you do not recognize these samskaras. The parents of Shankaracharya did not want him to take sannyasa, they wanted him to marry and Shankaracharya had to do all kinds of funny tricks to get out of that situation. He had to miraculously create a crocodile.

In Indian society especially marriage is a strong conditioning. If your son wants to take sannyasa, will you give your blessings? No, you will not, you will oppose his samskara and impose your conditioning on that son, or that daughter, who wishes to follow a different path. You will want your son or daughter to go on the path that you have chosen and decided for them. They do not have the capacity to know for sure what kind of samskaras they have come with, and you wish to impose on them your own thoughts and ideas that you believe will bring happiness, contentment and satisfaction to their lives.

There are some people who need marriage, and there are some who do not; it is according to their samskaras. If you marry, no problem; you can have a good family life. In that family life you can live a balanced and harmonious spiritual life as well.

How can I surrender to my guru?

It is difficult. To understand the word 'surrender' and to be able to surrender is difficult for you do not know what to surrender. One local farmer came a few years ago and said, "Swamiji, I want to become your disciple. I want to surrender myself, I want to take initiation." I said, "All right, come when there is diksha. Take diksha and do your sadhana." The man came on the day of diksha and said, "Today I give you my body, my mind, my everything." Wonderful. Mango season came, and this man had a mango farm. One day a swami was sent to deliver a message to the man,

“Swamiji is saying to send about thirty or forty mangos for the sannyasins.” The man says, “Please convey my message to Swamiji that I surrendered to him my body and my mind, but not my mangos.”

The actual meaning of surrender is found in the Sanskrit word ‘samarpan’: sama and arpana. *Arpana* means to offer, just as you offer flowers. *Sama* means totally. Therefore, *samarpan* means total surrender; you offer yourself completely and wholeheartedly. This has to be seen in relation to one’s nature and personality. When you have offered everything, what have you offered? If you say, “I want to surrender,” what are you going to surrender? This surrender should not be an intellectual or analytical thought nor an emotional reaction made in a desperate moment: “I let myself go.” Surrender has to be thought about, because the ultimate surrendering is a total offering. What does that total offering mean? Is it possible to surrender the ego? Is it possible to surrender the *buddhi*, the higher intellect? Is it possible to surrender the mind?

Somewhere, at some place, and at some point you will discover that you have not surrendered yourself completely. Although intellectually you may think you have, in reality you have not. One of the indications of surrendering or not surrendering is the critical nature of the mind. Intellectual thoughts will come up such as comparing with other people, and self-pity will be felt if you feel you are ignored. The mind will play havoc with its own self if it feels that it is not receiving what it wants. Where is the surrender there?

Milarepa

There is the story of Milarepa. Milarepa, a very ordinary person, goes to his guru Marpa in Tibet to become his disciple and to learn the art of spiritual life. Upon admission into the ashram Marpa tells Milarepa, “There is only one thing I want you to do, and you will be so busy with that that you will not have time to come to lectures, satsangs or classes, so do not even think about it. You just keep on doing your

work.” What was the work? Marpa told him, “Make a stone hut for me on top of the mountain, but there are conditions to it. You will have to carry the rocks from the bottom of the mountain.” Milarepa agreed.

Put yourself in the shoes of Milarepa. If you came here with the purpose of learning yoga and I told you, “Sorry, you will be too busy with this job that I am going to give you, you won’t have time to attend the classes,” would you accept that? You would say, “I didn’t come here to do your menial job, I came here to join the course!” Milarepa did not say that. He said, “All right, I will make the house for you. Then I can participate in your classes.” Marpa said, “Fine.”

Every morning Milarepa would carry the stones and rocks on his back up the winding road to the top of the mountain, and in six months time he was able to make a stone hut. After the completion of the hut, the guru Marpa came to see it. Guruji went up the mountain, looked at it and said, “Yes, the hut is nice, but I do not like the scenery from here. I like the scene from the bottom of the mountain. So shift the entire hut down, stone by stone, piece by piece.” Would you have done it? If you put yourself in the shoes of Milarepa, would you have done it? Yes or no? Milarepa did what his guru asked him to do. Once the work was completed Guruji said, “No, I do not like this scene, this view or this location. Put it back up there.” Again, Milarepa did it.

If you were in his place you would say to Guruji, “Find somebody else to do it. I’m going to find myself another guru.” That would be the normal reaction of any normal person. Milarepa’s response indicates surrender: unflinching obedience to the command of the master. No if’s, but’s or why’s about it. As long as there are if’s, but’s and why’s in your life you cannot surrender. If’s, but’s and why’s are expressions and extensions of the ego. They are expressions and extensions of manas, buddhi, and chitta. To transcend these four levels, meaning to surrender totally and absolutely, is practically impossible. Therefore, only very few people can achieve samarpan, the absolute and the

final surrender. Very few people are the privileged ones who have the inner strength to overcome the basic instincts of the mind, to overcome the basic instincts of life.

There is always hope for you as long as you adhere to the process of sadhana and follow the guidelines of the guru with faith and with belief. You may not be able to surrender one hundred percent, but you will definitely be able to bypass certain levels of your own mind and consciousness which hold you back, and that will be your achievement. Even by cultivating the *anasakti bhava*, the feeling of non-attachment, one can go a fair distance on the path of surrender, letting go and offering oneself to the fulfilment of one's destiny.

What is the importance of karma sannyasa diksha if you already have the attitude of a karma sannyasin?

Attitude only is not good enough. It is like asking, "If I am studying at home, why is it necessary to go to school? I'm studying the same subject at home." You need to go to school so that you can be tested. If you pass you move on, if you fail you re-study. So home-study is not enough. Similarly, just having the attitude of karma sannyasa is not good enough. Who will decide whether you have passed or failed? If it were left up to you, you would like to give yourself a 100 percent mark all the time. Somebody who is not you has to see, has to judge how much you have progressed. Therefore initiation is important as it connects you to the spirit of karma sannyasa. Not only karma sannyasa but any form of initiation is meant to enforce the connection with the guru who can see you.

Developing a strong link

After all, you have been doing mantra at home, so why you need to take diksha? You have been repeating thousands of mantras every day at your home: one of Ganesha, one of Durga, one of Rama, one of Krishna. Still you want to take mantra diksha, why? You want to take diksha to enforce the connection, to have a link, the thin string.

In India, schoolchildren read in their history books the story about how Shivaji once conquered an impenetrable fort. The question was how to get inside the fort with steep rocks and high walls. Shivaji hit upon the idea of using a monitor lizard. This lizard can go up steep walls because it has a good grip. So Shivaji tied one light, thin string around the tail of the lizard and let the lizard go. The lizard went up the ramparts of the castle and then inside, taking the string along with it, attached to the tail. One of Shivaji's men, an infiltrator, was inside and he picked up the lizard, took off the thin string and began to pull it. On the other end of the thin string Shivaji had tied a thicker one, so gradually the inside man brought up the thicker one and tied it firmly. With the help of that rope the soldiers were able to climb in.

Initiation is like that. When you first start with your initiation your mantra is a tiny string. It is a fine string which can break at any time and it does break many times. You do the mantra for one month while you are infused with the spirit of the ashram, then after spending one month in high-flying society, partying every day, the spiritual connection dissipates and the material connection becomes strong. Then after six months you realize, "Hey, what am I doing? I should be doing something else." Then again you come back to the mantra. If you are able to keep pulling that thin string it will become a thick rope in the course of time. Once you have the thick rope you can climb anywhere. That is how I see initiation. It is a confirmation of one's sankalpa, a commitment that you make in front of the guru and God, not just in front of yourself.

Conviction

You by yourself do not have the conviction or the strength. You cannot even change a simple habit, so how can you develop the lifestyle of a karma sannyasin? You cannot even manage to get up on time regularly every day, one simple thing, and you want to control and direct your karmas? You cannot even overcome a negative habit of smoking or

drinking, and you want to rule your karma? Not possible. When you are unable to manage the basic behaviour of the mind, how are you going to understand the intricate subtle processes of karma in relation to your life? Just by thinking about it? When you cannot control a negative thought, how is it possible to guide the effect of the karma or to become immune from the effects and the results of the karma?

Initiation is a sankalpa, a commitment that you undertake to enforce your own conviction and inner strength and to acquire willpower. Guru becomes the teacher who decides whether you have failed or passed. If you have failed the guru says, “Keep on doing what you were doing.” If you have passed, guru says, “Now move on to the next stage.” You cannot see your own face, it is only the other person who can see your face and say whether you are beautiful or ugly. If you can see your own face then you do not need a guru. Guru is only a mirror that reflects what is in front of him, that is all. If you can see yourself in that reflection, then that gives you encouragement and strength, and gives you the will to follow your sankalpa to the end.

—9 August 2007

Can you tell us about the Sri Yantra, and is there a particular way to use it in one’s sadhana?

You have to know what Sri Yantra is and its relevance to one’s development and growth. According to the spiritual concepts of India, the mind and consciousness are guided by certain archetypes. The behaviour of consciousness is decided by the impressions latent and inherent in consciousness. This subject of consciousness is different from the theory conveyed by modern psychology, which says that consciousness is divided into the conscious, subconscious and unconscious faculties. From the yogic perspective, consciousness is a continuous evolutionary process through which one becomes more and more aware of one’s internal spiritual nature, and as one goes deeper into

the consciousness, the language and the understanding of consciousness changes.

Beyond words and thought

At one level words are used to communicate, like now we are using words to convey an idea. At a deeper level the thoughts become powerful and it is the thoughts that are conveyed, and a sadhaka can receive these thoughts as well. At an even deeper level the thoughts, which are a creation of the intellect, cease to have any meaning and one connects instead to the inherent archetypes that are the conditionings of consciousness. Some people call them *samskaras*, some people call them by other names, but even at this level there is progression, development and a sequence.

These archetypes are neither language nor thoughts nor ideas, rather they are impressions. Just as a rubber stamp leaves an imprint on a piece of paper, similarly in consciousness, in the spiritual dimension where words and thoughts do not exist because they are creations of the mind, you would discover or express an internal experience through symbols. In yoga these symbols are known as yantras and mandalas. There are different grades of yantras, and the highest yantra in all the collection of mantras and yantras is Sri Yantra.

Mahamaya

Sri Yantra is the symbol of cosmic energy, of the Cosmic Mother. This Cosmic Mother can be given any name, but the name which has been given by the tradition and in the scriptures is Mahamaya, *maha* meaning great, and *maya* meaning the power of illusion. This power of illusion is not something that you perceive through your eyes. This illusion is the identification of the spirit with the material dimension. That is the actual meaning of *maya*, identifying with something that in reality you are not.

For example, you have a dream or a nightmare that somebody with a knife is chasing you to kill you and you

are running away. You feel the fear, you feel the anxiety, and you know that you are running. You know that you are living an experience in the dream, and while you are in the dream, the dream is real. Suddenly you wake up and you give a sigh of relief, "Thank God! Nobody is chasing me with a knife; I am in my bed." When you are awake the intensity of the dream does not affect you, but when you are sleeping, when you are dormant, the dream has an influence on your personality, on your mind and on your nature. Which is real?

While you are dreaming the dream world is real, and when you are up and awake, the visible world is real. Even when you go into deep sleep where you do not experience anything, no body, no time and no space, only sleep, then that too is real. You cannot negate that. For eight hours you have been sleeping and you cannot negate it. In the state of deep sleep you are not aware that you are sleeping; if somebody picks you up, carries you on their shoulder and puts you out of the gate, you don't notice it, you don't even know that you have been displaced.

In the waking state you are subject to time, space and object. In the dreaming state you are under the influence of time and space, but not object. Only time and space. In deep sleep even time does not exist; you are contained only in space. Beyond time, space and object is the realm of the spirit. This spiritual dimension is symbolized through yantras and mandalas, and this spiritual dimension is the dimension of Mahamaya. It is because of this power of Mahamaya that you identify with the outer world and are able to feel pain, suffering, happiness and joy. When that is real, then you are under that experience. When you transcend it, then what is pain? What is pleasure? What is happiness? What is discontentment? They do not exist because you have transcended them, and when you transcend them you identify with the spiritual reality and not the material. That spiritual reality, and this cosmic power which controls and governs, is the Mahamaya.

Connect with the force

Sri Yantra is the symbol of Mahamaya, the cosmic power, the cosmic creatrix. According to personal experience as well as scriptural descriptions, when you wear a yantra, when you wear the symbol of that cosmic force, it acts like a magnet to focus that cosmic energy and create a force field around you. When you concentrate or practise meditation on Sri Yantra, or any other yantra, you are using that yantra as a tool to focus the cosmic energy within yourself.

One example: During the war in Yugoslavia there was a news report saying that the buildings were being ‘painted by laser’, meaning that from a satellite in space, a laser beam would be aimed to identify a building and then the missile would be directed there. Just as a satellite identifies a building and then directs a missile to that building, in the same manner, when you wear a yantra it creates a force field around you. You cannot see it with the naked eye, but the force field is there, and that force field attracts the greater force towards itself. When you concentrate on a yantra, you are focusing the cosmic energy within yourself. When you wear a yantra, you are directing the cosmic energy that pervades the entire world and the universe to that yantra which you are wearing.

In the higher states of meditation Sri Yantra is used to access the deeper realms of consciousness. However, meditation on yantra is not for people like you for you are still struggling with the management of your conscious level. You are still struggling to find your own balance in the mental vrittis. If you use a yantra you can only use it in the practice of *trataka* in which you focus your gaze on something external to concentrate your senses and mind.

As the sadhana continues, as the journey continues, the visual and the sensorial focus ceases to have any role to play in the life of a sadhaka. This sensorial focus will only cease completely when you are able to manage the vrittis of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind. Then the yantra comes alive within you and you enter into that

dimension. Actual yantra sadhana is higher yoga, but initially people can use the image of a yantra to focus the sensorial, visual perceptions and mental perceptions to reach a state of concentration.

Once this power is focused on you, all that is auspicious, good and benevolent will happen to you, and you will be protected from the negativity and distresses of life.

—17 August 2007

What does a guru expect from his disciple? How can one define success in spiritual life?

Guru does not have any expectations of the disciple or follower. In fact, it is the other way around. Followers and disciples have a lot of expectations of the guru.

The role of guru is only to show the path, just like a traffic policeman who stands at the crossroads and tells the person on the journey, “This is the road to your destination.” Now the person who is on the journey has a lot of expectations, but the person simply standing at the crossroads directing traffic has no expectation. You cannot expect the traffic policeman to sit in your car and go with you on your journey. If he goes on the journey with you then he is not a policeman. In the same manner, guru has no expectation; if there is any expectation, it is the same as the traffic police, that you complete your journey by following the path he has shown you and that is all. Therefore, follow the guidelines; follow the instructions given to you without interference of your own intellect, without interference of your own expectations. Be determined; have faith and conviction that ‘This path which I have been directed towards will lead me ultimately to my goal’. That is all. Guru is the freest person and has no expectations.

What do I expect from you after you have come here? Nothing. What have you given me? Nothing. You have not given me anything and I have not given you anything. You will be going away tomorrow or the next day, and who

knows when our paths may cross again? Maybe this is the first and the last time you are seeing me, or maybe this is the beginning of a continuous interaction. We do not know about that. If you can follow the instructions and the guidelines that you have received then ultimately you will succeed. Ultimately you will succeed and your success is the success of the guru. Then guru can be happy that at least one person out of millions has followed the instructions and attained happiness, prosperity and peace. That is the indication of spiritual life: your ability to follow a direction with faith, conviction and dedication.

How do you define right and wrong?

I do not have to define it. It has already been defined. Right is that which uplifts a person and which uplifts a community, wrong is something which is destructive to a person and to the community. When you do something right, at that moment your actions and your mentality are according to justice and the precepts of dharma, and when you do something wrong, it is injustice and against dharma. That is all. Our concept of right and wrong changes every day; if an Indian goes to France or Germany or New York and begins to eat in a restaurant with his fingers then it will be considered wrong, and if a foreigner who comes to an ashram demands a fork, knife and spoon that is wrong, simple as that.

—17 August 2007

How can we teach yogic lifestyle to the people in the city?

You do not have to teach anybody anything – you live it yourself. If you can live it you will become an inspiration to other people. People who think they can reform society need to reform themselves first. Once you have reformed yourself, you do not have to teach others anything.

I will give you an example, a practical one from when our guru Swami Satyananda went to live in seclusion in Rikhia.

It is a tribal area and there used to be many events during which people would come asking for donations to celebrate their own festivities. One day a boy came and asked, "Can I have ten rupees?" We asked him, "For what?" He said, "I want to go to see a movie." Swami Satsangi gave a beautiful answer to that boy. She said, "Look, we are willing to spend ten thousand rupees on you if you are in need, if you are sick, if you are ill, or if you have no food at home, but we are not willing to give you a single rupee to waste for your entertainment." That simple statement made the boy see the value of money and of the support and help that he could receive, and he got out of that wasteful mentality. We are not against movies, anybody is free to see them, but how do they help anybody? It is only entertainment.

In that same region there used to be a lot of balis or sacrifices happening. Sri Swamiji called the villagers and said, "You people have come asking for money to buy a bakra, a goat for bali. Tell me one thing, why do you give bali? Why do you sacrifice?" They said, "Well, it is part of the ritual." Sri Swamiji asked, "What do you hope to gain from it?" The villagers replied, "Kali will become happy and then she will give her grace to us." He asked them, "Who is Kali?" "She is the Mother of the universe." Then Sri Swamiji asked, "Is she the Mother of the animals and insects and humans, too?" They said, "Yes." Sri Swamiji told them, "In your family there are ten kids. If one is taken for sacrifice will the mother be happy?" They said, "No." He said, "That is the reason for your poverty, because you think that in order to please Mother you can sacrifice one of her children. By killing a child of the Mother you think Mother will become happy?" He said nothing more, but from that day onwards there was no bali taking place in that region.

Spiritual life means a life that you lead with understanding, compassion and clarity. Spiritual life does not mean that you keep on doing mantra japa twenty-four hours of the day or read scriptures once every day for months or for years or for the whole of your life. Spiritual life is

not just a life in which identification with God takes place, rather spiritual life is a life where you cultivate the positive qualities within yourself, and that can only happen through inspiration. If you become an inspiration then others are affected by that. There is no need to propagate spiritual life; you try to live spiritual life yourself and once you are able to light your own candle, with that candle other people can light their candle as well.

How does one overcome the feeling of guilt when one does something wrong? In the vedic tradition is there any equivalent to the confession?

Everybody goes through states of guilt; it is the nature of the human mind. That guilt comes when you know you have done wrong, despite knowing what is right. When you act against what is right, afterwards the guilt will come. If you are doing the right thing at the right time there is no question of guilt at all. If there is any confession, it does not happen through a priest in a church, rather that confession happens between one's Self and God. God has given you this life and you can use it, abuse it or misuse it. If you abuse your life, if you misuse your life, then you have to seek pardon from the person who has given you the life, and that is God.

What is the meaning of the greeting *Hari Om* and *Hari Om Tat Sat*?

Om you know. *Hari* is the 'ultimate reality' or 'God'. *Tat* means 'that'. *Sat* means 'truth', so the meaning of *Hari Om Tat Sat* is 'the only truth'. In English *Hari Om* sounds like 'hurry home'; hurry meaning 'to hasten' and home meaning 'house', so return to your home quickly and that home is the reality, that home is the truth.

I will give you one example. Once one of the greatest saints, the poet saint of India Kabir Das, was sitting down having a satsang after the completion of the day's work. One man came and said, "Can you give me some instruction, some guidance?" Kabir said only one sentence, "The sun

is setting, hurry home.” This man bowed to Kabir and went home. The other disciples and people in satsang said to Kabir, “This man asked for some guidance, for some instruction and you only said, ‘The sun is setting, hurry home’. What is the meaning?” Kabir said, “Go and ask that man what he has understood.” They went to the house of the person and asked him, “What did you understand from Kabir Das?” He replied, “It was simple. He gave me a clear indication of what I have to do. ‘The sun is setting’, means my life is coming to its end; there are only a few more hours of sunlight left, a few more years of my life left. ‘Hurry home’, means that in the remaining period I have to strive, I have to make the effort to go back to my home, to my divine abode, the place of God.”

Swamiji, why is it said that your worst enemy and your worst situation are your best teachers?

Only through them can you realize your own shortcomings and make an attempt to rectify them. After all, why does a ‘worst situation’ come in somebody’s life? Why does one make enemies? How can you correct yourself? If I fight with somebody and somebody has animosity towards me, it shows an incompatibility and that incompatibility is due to ego or self-assertiveness. Whose fault is it? My own, so I have to manage it; it is a weakness, it is a shortcoming of my own life.

A story: Once an astrologer was called by the king. The king asked him, “Tell me my future.” The astrologer looked at the chart, held his head and said, “I have never seen a worse chart than this. O king, your entire kingdom and your entire family will perish before you. All is death.” Of course the king became furious. He said, “Throw this astrologer in jail! He is predicting that my entire family and my entire kingdom will be destroyed. He is no good. Call another one!” Another astrologer came, this one a bit more prepared because he knew the fate of the first. He said, “What a wonderful chart! I have never seen such a chart! My king, you are going to live so long that you will even outlive

all your family members.” The king became happy upon hearing that he was going to live a long life.

Although both astrologers said the same thing, one said it in a gross way and the other said it in an enigmatic way. The one who said it in a gross way made the king his enemy, and the one who said it in a diplomatic way got a reward from the king. Therefore, understanding is the primary requirement to know how to deal with situations. If you can deal with situations in the right manner, nobody becomes your enemy and there are no distressful situations for you to face. Only when you go about the whole thing in the wrong manner, with your arrogance and ego and your assertiveness, do things change and spoil.

—17 August 2007

ON BHAKTI AND THE MOVEMENT OF ENERGY

Emotion, e-motion means ‘energy in motion’. You can become happy and you can become sad. By calling you an idiot, the energy can be moved; by calling you a happy and loving person, the energy can be moved. At present these energies are being directed outwards due to our sensorial association with the world of name, form and idea. When the mind associates with an object outside, it gives birth to a state of perception and to a state of mind. If you see a young child, your child, that association will give birth to something called affection. If you see a bag of money lying on the road with nobody to claim it, that will give birth to a state called greed. If you fall head over heels in love, that association will give birth to a state called passion. If you see somebody who is well-to-do and you are aspiring for that, that association will give birth to jealousy. Like this, every association can give birth to a particular state of mind. Lust, greed, jealousy, hatred, envy, love, affection, compassion – they are all different manifestations of the same energy.

How to channel emotion

When these manifestations of energy that flow outwards into the sensorial dimension are contained, they have to be channelled to some other place, and when you channel them towards your inner Self or towards your God it becomes bhakti. It is as simple as that, but the trick is knowing how to channel it. You could channel it through meditation; that is one channel. Some people can become bhaktas only through meditation because they have identified with that higher nature. Some people need to channel it through an outer ritual; they have a picture to worship, they put flowers, garland it, light a deepak, light incense, do arati. Some people can channel their energy through the study of scriptures. There are various forms of channelling that emotion towards the divine, towards the transcendental nature. The realization of the transcendental nature will then give birth to another set of disciplines.

Just as you consider raja yoga to be the yoga of mind management, you have to consider bhakti yoga as the yoga of emotion management, of how to manage your *bhavas*. This emotion management becomes real and substantial when you are able to identify with the people who surround you and connect with the environment around you. When you connect with yourself it is not bhakti; you have to connect with the environment. It is a different attitude of mind altogether. If you believe that bhakti is the way to God, God-realization or God-experience, that is all right also, but then that God is not the abstract God, somebody up in heaven, that God becomes the physical God. If God is omnipresent, if God is everyone, then yes, even a suffering man has God in him. A man who is hungry, in him God is also hungry; a man who is dying, in him God is also dying; a man who is in pain, in him God is also in pain; a man who is content, in him God is also content.

Swami Sivananda's eight-fold path

Another perspective of bhakti is connecting with others around you and realizing that a part of divinity is living in them also. It is the connection with this part of divinity that becomes the aim of bhakti. Therefore, Swami Sivananda speaks of 'the eight-fold path of yoga'. The yoga of Swami Sivananda begins once the yoga of Sage Patanjali has been completed, because Patanjali's yoga represents the sequential effort of an individual to attain a different state of mind and realization, known as *sadhanatmak*. Sivananda's yoga represents the behavioural component of yoga; living what you have attained. Patanjali's yoga completes with samadhi – yamas, niyamas, asanas, pranayamas, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Until samadhi it is a personal effort to find peace, stability, strength, courage and conviction in life, and to attain *sthitaprajna*, the firm establishment of wisdom.

Once you have attained samadhi, you come to Sivananda's yoga in which the first component is service; from the personal you move towards the universal. The second component is to love. Third is to give. Fourth is to purify. Fifth is to be good. Sixth is to do good. Seventh is to meditate and the eighth is to realize. The last two limbs of the yoga of Sivananda are the same as that of Patanjali; only what you have gained through personal effort you are now putting into practice, and once you put yoga into practice, it has become bhakti yoga. The culmination of yoga is always bhakti, not jnana and not karma. Even in samadhi it is bhakti jnana; it is the merger of the individual with the Cosmic. When the merger of the individual with the Cosmic happens it is bhakti, a fusion of energies which are non-linear and non-logical, not intellectual, but pure and raw.

—29 September 2007

KRIYA YOGA

How do the kriya yoga practices and techniques by themselves help us become better or stronger personalities? For example, our negativities will still have to be dealt with by other practices like japa, antar mouna, yoga nidra, the SWAN technique, karma yoga, satsang and so on.

The question is wrong. First you have to understand the placement of kriya yoga in the scheme of yogas. Yoga begins with *hatha yoga*, the preparation and purification of the physical body and the pranas. Then it moves on into *raja yoga*, mind management; then on to *jnana yoga*, developing wisdom in life. Next is *bhakti yoga*, channelling the emotions, and then one comes to the higher yogas like kundalini yoga and kriya yoga. Therefore, when you are learning kriya yoga it is because you have already gone through the processes of hatha and raja yoga, you have had a glimpse of jnana and bhakti yoga, and then at the end you come to kriya yoga.

Understand the correct sequence

The preparation of the nadis, senses, and brain, and the detoxification of the body take place through hatha yoga. All the mental behaviours are adjusted through raja yoga, so that by the time you come to practise kriya yoga you do not have to worry about anything physical or mental, you can just focus on developing the experience of kriya yoga. This question is not properly put for the function of kriya yoga is not to make you a better personality or a better yogi, rather it is to give you access to the layers of consciousness which you have not yet tapped or experienced: that is the psychic dimension of the human being.

You are aware of your body for it is something that is physical, visible, and can be touched, felt and experienced. After the body you become aware of the mind. You can have glimpses of the mind due to the thoughts that come up, the desires that come up, the different mental behaviours

that manifest when you encounter the various mental expressions. You then realize that there is something beyond the body which you have called 'the mind'. Beyond the mind is another dimension of experience, and that is consciousness. None of you have experienced that consciousness until today; you have experienced the mind, but not consciousness. Even in the highest heights of samadhi you are pacifying and stilling the mind; there is no direct cognition of human consciousness.

Human consciousness is infinite. It is not confined to time and space; it is just a continuity of existence, a continuity of experience. With the practices of kriya yoga you are able to come to the point where you begin to access the dimension of consciousness. The energy, the strength, the force that you encounter in that dimension is used to improve the quality of life in this dimension. Therefore kriya yoga is a practice which stands by itself. It does not work with your personality, mental behaviour or attitudes, rather it brings about an awakening of the dormant centres of the personality.

Is kriya yoga not a process in which the chakras are being tinkered with in a manner that is both unnatural and uncalled for? Is it true that Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* do not refer to anything like kriya yoga and if so, what or who is the source of this technique called 'kriya yoga'?

First of all, Sage Patanjali was not an authority on kriya yoga. He was a simple sannyasin like us and his masters degree, his thesis or dissertation, was on raja yoga, not on kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, chakras, hatha yoga, mantra yoga or anything else. When you go to university for your masters degree you have to write a thesis, a dissertation. What do you do? Do you write the dissertation on every subject that you have studied in the university, or do you choose one topic and write on that? You choose one topic.

Sage Patanjali was a raja yogi. When Patanjali came to the Yoga University he was called to write a dissertation and

his dissertation was on raja yoga. Yogi Swatmarama, the author of *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, was a hatha yogi. Like this, all the masters of the past have picked one topic of yoga and expanded on that. Therefore Patanjali's authority is on raja yoga and not on any other form of yoga. He might have known the other yogas, he might have practised the other yogas, but his masters degree was received when he wrote the thesis of raja yoga. It was not necessary that Patanjali refer to kundalini or kriya yoga in the book that he was writing, just as if you are writing a thesis on math you do not refer to history, geography and biology.

Creativity and sadhana

As far as kriya yoga is concerned, what do you mean by 'tinkering with chakras, brain and human nature'? In this world everything is subject to permutation and combination. You take earth, soil, and mix water to it; you knead it, you prepare it, you make clay, and then you make a pot. Why are you tinkering with soil in that manner, in an unnatural way? Why are you mixing water and making soil into a pot? I mean, this logic should apply everywhere, not only with kriya yoga. In order to make paper you use the bark of the tree. Why? In order to make fabric or even a building you use so many different things and put them together. In this world everything, nature, all the elements and gunas, are subject to combinations and permutations. The combination of different things gives birth to a new entity, such as a pot.

Similarly, the human body and human life are endowed with great possibilities and potentials which remain untapped and unknown until today. Because they are untapped and unknown, some people believe that a natural process should take place in their awakening. If you are waiting for a natural process to take place, you will have to wait maybe millions of years, yet if you are keen to explore and discover the possibilities and potentials that are inherent, then you begin the journey by opening the door and stepping out of the house, and the process of sadhana is

that. There is a statement in the *Yoga Sutras* about sadhana: *Sa tu dirghakala nairantaryasatkarasevito dridhabhumih* (1:14) – “Any practice done for an extended period of time, in a continuous manner, without breaks and with faith, prepares the ground for sowing the right seeds.”

Know your own house

This is the concept of sadhana, and kriya yoga is a sadhana, preparing the ground and discovering what is contained in the house in which you live. After all, when you have an apartment, when you have a house, you know everything that is in the house; which room has the bed, where you keep your food items, where you keep your money, where you keep your clothes and other items. That house is known to you; if you need a spoon you know where it is, if you need a book or a writing pad you know where it is, if you need to sleep, you know where to go. Do you know the same about your body, mind and spirit, the house in which you have lived for so many years? Do you know what is inside? No. Regarding the body, you know that you have the senses and that you have this body. Regarding the mind, there is a vague understanding, but beyond that there is no other concept of what you have inside waiting to come out, waiting to flower.

In the desert all you see is yellow sand, but when the rain comes, suddenly the desert blooms with flowers. When the right environment comes, the entire desert can become a field of flowers. Just by looking at the yellow sand one cannot say that there is an absence of plants and flowers in the desert; the conditions have to be right and then the flowers will grow. In the same manner, look at yourself. Right now everything is barren; yellow sand inside the heart, yellow sand inside the mind, yellow sand in the personality. However, create the right conditions, let there be rain, and you will see the flowering in your heart and mind. Everything happens because of two things coming together, one thing by itself is insufficient. Soil cannot become a pot by itself; it needs water to become a pot.

Then transcend the limitations

Similarly, you have a perception or an understanding of yourself that is more focused in the dimension of the body, and an understanding of your mind that is mainly focused in the dimension of your likes, dislikes, ambitions, desires and expectations, but nothing beyond that. This is a restricted awareness and understanding of your own nature and your own life. With this restricted awareness and understanding of yourself you function in this world. However, all the spiritual traditions, as well as the religious traditions of the past, have spoken of a possibility to transcend the material consciousness. Transcending the material consciousness is an effort, no doubt, and to establish oneself in spiritual consciousness is also an effort, because it is a conditioning of existence. In yoga we use the term *Brahmi vritti*, meaning a mental modification which is divine, transcendental.

In the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali is talking about the definition of yoga as *Chitta vritti nirodhah* (1:2), stopping the patterns of mind, these patterns and behaviours of mind which are external. Through this you are giving birth to a new vritti, a new conditioning known as *Brahmi vritti*, the transcendental conditioning of mind that takes you through your spiritual journey. Therefore ‘tinkering’ is not the right word to use for kriya yoga. It is a combination, permutation and transformation of the different faculties and qualities that are inherent within you which have to be brought to the surface of existence. For that purpose, kriya yoga is a useful tool.

—29 September 2007

RELIGIONS AND TRADITIONS

When all the practices adapted by BSY and adopted by BSY are basically Hindu, how far is it correct to say that the sannyasins of BSY do not belong to any religion?

The word ‘Hindu’ is derived from the word ‘Indus’, the river Indus. People who lived in the surroundings of the river Indus

were called 'Indus' which later on, with Arabic influence, became 'Hindu'. The so-called intellectuals of human society called 'Hindu' a religion, which is wrong. Hindu is not a religion, it is just an identification for a group of people who lived beyond a river called Indus, and that is all. The name was actually given by Alexander the Great. When he was invading this country he had to cross the river Indus and he called the people 'Indus', but the people from this area followed many different traditions. In fact, there were people who believed in the philosophy of Shaivism who were the Shaivas; people who believed in the philosophy of Shaktism who were the Shaktas; people who believed in the philosophy of Vaishnavism, known as Vaishnavas; people who believed in the philosophy of the Sun, called the Sauryas; and there were people who believed in the philosophy of Ganapati, the Ganapatias. Like this, the different groups and sects who lived in this part of the world had a religion, a system or a culture that was collectively known as the Sanatana Dharma, not as Hindu.

Sanatana Dharma

I am telling you that there is no such thing as a Hindu religion even today, rather all these sects and traditions come under this broad umbrella of the Sanatana Dharma. *Sanatana* means 'eternal' – that which has no beginning and no end, and *dharma* is the law, the fundamental support of life. Under this umbrella of Sanatana Dharma, everybody is free to follow their own convictions in life.

India is the only country in the world where in a single family one can find so many different religions coexisting. I know families where the husband is a Shaivite, the wife is a Christian, the son is a Muslim, his brother a Buddhist, and they all live together in the same house. My own guru Swami Satyananda says about his family – that his father was part of the Arya Samaj and did not believe in any kind of worship, his mother was a Gandhian, a follower of Gandhi, his sister was a Christian nun, his brother had married a Muslim girl and he himself had become a sannyasin.

India is the only country where different ideologies can coexist like this, without any problem, and therefore we do not have difficulty in digesting any philosophy or religion that comes our way. I am using the word 'digesting'. We can digest everything; we can digest Islam, we can digest Christianity, we can digest Buddhism. It has already been digested. Who knows, maybe after hundreds or thousands of years when Christianity is nowhere to be found in the West, Christ will continue to live on in India, because Christianity will have been digested by us. Christ would be an *avatara*, a divine incarnation, like Buddha is an *avatara*, like Krishna and Rama are *avataras*. We in India have good stomachs with the ability to digest anything and everything that cannot yet be digested by western society.

The spiritual practices do not belong to any one philosophy, belief or religion. Is meditation Hindu, Islamic, Christian, Buddhist, or what? There is meditation and contemplation in Christianity, in Islam, in Buddhism, in yoga, in tantra and in Vedanta, so does this practice become a religious practice belonging to one tradition? Does a car become a Hindu car, a Christian car or a Muslim car depending on who happens to drive it? No. In the same manner, the practices which are meant to develop the human consciousness, human nature, are universal. Mathematics is universal, history is universal. It is the same with all the *sadhanas* that have come up from the beginning of time until right now; other people have adopted them in the course of their own studies. Vipassana, which is taught in Buddhism, is nothing but *pratyahara* as adopted by the Buddha. Has vipassana become a Buddhist technique now? No.

Belief, philosophy, and practices, these three have remained separate in this part of the world; they have not merged together. I am free to believe in anything that I want. I am free to follow my philosophy in any manner that I wish to live it. I am free to follow my own religious precepts because it is a personal experience, a personal connection that I am developing with my Self and the

Divine. The practices which are used to get to that point are universal, and they are part of this Sanatana tradition. Sects and religions came much later on, philosophies developed much later, but the quest to discover the benevolent and the beautiful within every individual predates all philosophies and religions of the world. Those techniques which help discover one's own Self are the sadhanas, which we find in abundance in tantric philosophy, and yoga is part of tantra. It is an offshoot of tantra.

Sannyasins

As far as sannyasins are concerned, there is no doubt that we belong to a gathering of renunciates which is ancient. You will find that throughout Indian history, throughout all the ages right from Satya Yuga to Dwarka to Treta to Kali Yuga, sannyasins have had a specific aim. Sannyasins are not religious propagators, they are not religious monks. Of course, the influence of the tradition is there, but that does not make us into monks or a religious tradition. Two words combine to become sannyasa – 'sam' and 'nyasa'. *Sam* means total and *nyasa* means trust. When you create a trust, what do you do? You have certain aims and objectives. You put your money in the bank and you say, "This is the trust which I have created for such and such person." Once you create this trust you have no role to play in the trust, because it is now governed by rules and laws. You cannot withdraw the money when you want or use it how you wish to. It has to be used specifically for the set aims and objectives. Sannyasa is that: an individual putting his life into a trust to serve. It is a commitment.

To serve and to be enlightened, *seva* and *shanti*, these are the true commitments of sannyasins. *Shanti* or peace is a personal achievement and discovery. *Seva* or service is the outward action or behaviour of sannyasins, and according to the times, the mode of *seva* changes. In our own tradition our background is that of Shankaracharya's Advaita Vedanta, but looking at the needs of the coming society, Swami Sivananda said, "No, Vedanta is not the subject of this age;

yoga is the subject of this age.” Therefore in my personal life as a sannyasin I am a Vedantin, but in my public life as a sannyasin, I am a yogi, a yoga teacher. If there is no need for yoga tomorrow in this society, then we will close down this yoga ashram and have something else. It is not that we are tied to this particular mode of seva; sannyasa is a flexible tradition, and depending on the needs of society you direct your efforts to fulfil that need.

There are different traditions of sannyasa. We belong to the Saraswati tradition of sannyasa, and the Saraswati tradition has been given the mandate to preserve and propagate *vidya*, knowledge, for posterity. Therefore we are concerned with the continuation, propagation and preservation of vidya, knowledge. If there is no need for us today, we will close down everything and go back to our reclusive habitat in the mountains, and a few centuries down the line when there is some new need, we will come back down. It is as simple as that. That is the role which sannyasins have played in human history.

The practices have been taken from the Sanatana tradition, not Hindu. The Sanatana tradition is a vast tradition, so much so that even the atheistic or Charvaka philosophy becomes part of the Sanatana tradition. I see the Sanatana tradition as a garden in which all different types of flowers are growing together. It is not a garden where only daffodils grow or only roses grow; it is too boring to have only one type of flower. The beauty of a garden is seen when there are different types of flowers, different colours of flowers, some big, some small, some young, some old, some subdued, some bright, some with thorns, some without thorns. The *Sanatana parampara*, the Sanatana culture, is that kind of garden, where beside a rose a cactus can coexist and add to the beauty of the garden. Ultimately, however, it is the personal effort that counts. How deep are you able to go within yourself to discover the wealth hidden inside? That is the important bit. A human being has to nurture and protect all that is beautiful, and all

that is auspicious and benevolent, and therefore a different vision has to evolve.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna says that he is the *Rigveda* out of the three Vedas. Were the Vedas only three at that time or were they four?

If you go back in the mythological tradition and you see Brahma, the creator with the four Vedas in his hands, which means there were always four. At the time of the Mahabharata, there was an enlightened being called Sage Vedavyasa who had undertaken a daunting task: to write down the Vedas. Prior to that, the Vedas were only an oral tradition.

Sage Vedavyasa started writing down the mantras on palm leaves, and by the time the Mahabharata war which is described in the *Bhagavad Gita* took place, only three Vedas were written; the work on the fourth was not complete. Therefore Krishna, when he is talking to Arjuna – although he is the fountain from which all knowledge comes forth says (10:22): *Vedaanaam Saamavedo smi* – “Among the Vedas I am the Samaveda.” In those days only three were inscribed: the *Rigveda*, the *Yajurveda*, and *Samaveda*. The *Atharvaveda* was in the process of being written down.

Please explain the significance of the techniques of tantra and how they are different from mantra and vipassana.

No need to mention about the tantra techniques for you will not be able to understand them. Right now you think of tantra as ‘left’ and ‘right’ only, but in the tradition there is no such thing as left tantra or right tantra. Tantra is a philosophy which was nurtured in this part of the world as a means to know the inner nature. There have been two kinds of civilizations in the world. The first kind manipulated the outer environment to make it comfortable and used the outer environment to lead a happy life. The other civilization looked inwards, not outwards. Those civilizations that looked inwards developed an understanding, a belief and a

system of philosophy of what lies inside the human realm of experience.

The civilization which manipulated nature and made nature comfortable to live in is the western civilization today. The civilizations which lived according to the rules of nature and discovered their inner self are the eastern civilizations. The Shinto philosophy of Japan, the Taoist philosophy of China, as well as Buddhism, Jainism and all the branches of the Indian Sanatana parampara fall under the eastern philosophy. If you look at history you will discover that rather than emphasizing outer arrangements and outer material discoveries, these civilizations gave more emphasis to inner experiences and inner discoveries. Tantra was the first philosophy and group of practices that came about in this part of the world.

The five components of tantra

Please let me make it clear that the original tantra is not the sexual tantra which you get all hyped-up about. The original tantra is classified into five categories. The first is the *vedachara*, living life according to the precepts of the vedic traditions, the vedic lifestyle. The second is *siddhantachara*, the theories of how a human being relates to the world, to the cosmos and to the higher forces, the energies and consciousness. The third component of tantra is *yogachara*, the yoga component. The fourth component is *dakshinachara*, in which isolation and intense, rigorous spiritual practices are defined. The fifth component is *kaulachara*, which defines how one can live a balanced spiritual life and experience the highest spiritual reality while living in the home, fulfilling the conditions and duties of the home by raising, sustaining and nurturing a family.

What in the West is called the 'left-hand tantra' is actually a reference to kaulachara: the practices that one practises at home. It is not only and not necessarily the sexual act between husband and wife. Due to its commercial market

value in western society, people have made out such ideas, but in reality it is a straightforward system.

Using these five components of vedachara, siddhantachara, yogachara, dakshinahchara and kaulachara, one can develop the human consciousness and free the dormant energies. The word *tantra* has three meanings: one is 'system', another is 'an instrument or tool', and the third is 'consciousness and energy'. The syllable *tan* comes from the word *tanoti*, which means to expand. Just as you pull the rubber band and it expands, that is *tanoti*. The second syllable, *tra*, is taken from the word *trayati*, which means to let go, to free, to release. What do you expand, what do you enlarge? Consciousness. What do you release, what do you free? Energy. So the full meaning and definition of the word *tantra* is 'expansion of consciousness and liberation of energy'. It is not a green card to sensual enjoyment in life, rather it is a discipline of life without negation of any idea, without negation of any situation or any circumstances; it is an acceptance and utilization of the situations or circumstances in life to grow and develop.

Liberation

Mantras are a part of tantra. In fact, all the branches which are a part of tantra end with 'tra', which means 'to liberate', like man-tra, yan-tra, tan-tra. Mantra means liberation of the mind, *mananat trayati mantrah*; it is a technique, a system, and a tool by which you can free the mind from its obsessive nature.

Yantra is releasing the vehicle. *Yan* is a vehicle. What is the vehicle in our life? It is consciousness, and *yantras* are geometric figures representing maps of consciousness. Just as when you go to a new place you look at the tourist map – the road goes here, the restaurant is there, the school is here – from the map you can get the full picture. In the same manner, yantras represent different maps of consciousness in different conditions and at different stages of growth. If you study the tantric literature, the description of these yantras is actually in the form of a city. 'The four doors' to the city are

the entrances, and the houses, the locations and the gardens, everything is described in there.

Tantric yantras do not mean anything to the uninitiated. For them they are only colourful geometric figures, nothing more. The tantric yantras cannot be rationalized. The Buddhist yantras and mandalas can be rationalized, 'This is the earth, this is heaven, this is hell, this is the Bodhisattwa, this is a demon, this is life, this is death'. An interpretation can be given to a religious symbol, but to a spiritual symbol there is no interpretation. If there is an interpretation it can only be realized once you have attained a level of consciousness where you begin to perceive your consciousness in that manner. Therefore the yantras in the tantric system are always used at the culmination of the journey, not at the beginning. In the beginning it is only mantra, yoga and other techniques of acquiring personal discipline and personal clarity, personal vision.

From the seventh century onwards, anything that was esoteric, or that people could not understand, was labelled as part of tantra. Since that time, the entire philosophy and concept of tantra has undergone a big change. Until the seventh century tantra was in its purest form. Meditation, the effort to transcend the body and mind, the effort to experience the inner consciousness and awaken the dormant energies, is the goal of the tantra. The goal is to experience the microcosm in a macrocosmic existence, to experience the macrocosm in our microcosmic existence.

—29 September 2007

Can you kindly tell us how Swami Sivananda received kriya yoga, and whether Babaji passed it on to him?

Kriya yoga is not a copyrighted subject, it is a tradition, it is a practice, and nobody can lay a claim on it as being exclusively or solely theirs. If you have the equipment you will dig the mine and get the gold out. That is how subjects have evolved over a period of time, over history, and kriya

yoga is a practice of yoga just like hatha yoga, raja yoga or kundalini yoga.

The credit of bringing the knowledge of kriya yoga to the western society goes to Paramahansa Yogananda, who in the early 1900s taught kriya yoga after taking the aspirants through their sadhana. Kriya yoga is not a lost tradition; Paramahansa Yogananda's teachings represent the emergence of kriya yoga into this modern western world. Swami Sivananda taught kriya yoga and that became another lineage, another school. The practices are the same, but the kriya yoga taught by Paramahansa Yogananda was adapted for the western culture whereas the kriya yoga taught by Swami Sivananda was kept in its original form. One form is the classical way and one is the modified way.

These two schools have coexisted even in the past. After all, Babaji must have learned from some guru, from some tradition. That person would have learned from somebody else. The lineage has continued but people who have propagated the subject on a bigger scale are the ones who are recognized today as representing the school of kriya yoga. We have been following the tradition of classical kriya yoga taught by Swami Sivananda. Swami Satyananda has taught that, and the Bihar School of Yoga continues to teach that. Classical kriya yoga as taught by the Bihar School of Yoga comes from the tradition of Adi Shankaracharya.

As Indians you know very well that *vidya* or knowledge is eternal, and if *vidya* is eternal then the practice is also eternal. After all, the panchagni *vidya* is also prescribed as a sadhana, and how it should be done has been explained in the Upanishads. How is it that despite it being a sadhana written in the books only five or six people are known to have practised it in all of history? In the same manner there are many other *vidyas*, and if anybody practises them or teaches them it does not mean that they own the right of that particular *vidya*. Everyone goes through their own experience.

—4 October 2007

THE SECRET OF LIFE

It is easier to fall back into the same old pattern than to improve and constantly try to improve oneself, to know and to apply. Success in life depends on continuously trying to know, learn and apply what you have learned. That is the secret of success in life. Never have the thought, 'Oh, I know this already'. Those who believe that 'I know this already' are the losers in the long run, because the ego comes up and says, 'I know it from before'. With this thought, a natural barrier goes up which stops the learning process. When you believe that you do not know anything, even when you may be master of the subject, you will always find that your performance improves each time. That is the secret of life.

—23 October 2007

THE MIND AND CONSCIOUSNESS

How does sadhana activate the brain? How can we imagine the ninety-percent of the brain that is dormant? Does it interfere with the separate area of the ten-percent that is used?

There is a belief that evolution is seen through the development of brain faculties, potentials and centres. Scientific discoveries have told us that the brain is ninety percent dormant. One-tenth of the faculties of the brain are active within you and the rest are in a state of dormancy or semi-inactivity,

Scientists try to measure the quality of the brain and whether the brain is more active or more awakened in a person or not. There is a story about Einstein. After his death his brain was kept in a lab to see how that brain was different from other 'normal' human brains. A very peculiar thing was discovered. As brain power increases, the weight of the brain decreases. The weight of a normal brain is about

1400 grams, but in so-called geniuses, the weight of the brain measures about 1200 grams. In Einstein's case it was 1230 grams. It has been predicted that as humans become more intelligent and aware, as the scope of consciousness and the experiences of consciousness enlarge, the brain will become smaller. This has even been predicted in our spiritual literature and scriptures: that the natural in-built destiny of brain is to continue evolving.

If you plant a seed in the ground and do not take care of it, if you do not give it water or fertilizers, if you do not protect it, then only through the natural course of evolution will the seed grow and eventually become a tree. Another seed that you nurture with water, fertilizer and protection will also grow into a tree, but the quality will be different; it will be a stronger and healthier. The leaves will be more vibrant, the fruits will be juicier, and the flowers will have more scent than those of the tree which had been neglected, ignored and left to survive on its own.

It is the same thing with human life and potentials, too. You are not trying to influence the brain to become active overnight through the practices of yoga or meditation, you are only creating a conducive environment for the natural potentials to manifest. If you practise sadhana, you create the right environment in which your own creativity can flower, and you are able to live a richer and better life in every respect – emotionally, mentally, spiritually, physically and even socially.

It is not that sadhana is trying to tinker with the brain or chakras or body to activate them or hasten the evolutionary process. The sadhanas, the yogas and all the other allied practices only open the doors of opportunity for people. Whether you choose to ignore or accept the opportunity and use it, is up to you. The question was about the brain, but what I am telling you is applicable to everything in life. In sadhana there is no tinkering, no change in anything of what one is, but simply the hardness of life is removed so that gentle, soft growth can take place, and that is all.

When I carefully watch my thoughts I realize that the thoughts and the mind are very quick. However what is it that is even quicker, and which produces or launches the thought? What is that energy that makes the thoughts happen?

This is a question that has also come up in the Upanishads. What is faster than thought? The ultimate answer was this: the container in which thought is contained. That is consciousness. Consciousness is all-expansive, all-pervasive, and thought is only an activity of that consciousness. Because it is universal, consciousness is present everywhere. That is the concept of omnipresence.

There is an example of this in the book *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. When Jonathan's teacher was describing the art of flying at a faster and greater speed, he said, "Simply believe that you are there and you are there." That is what Jonathan did. He believed that he was at the other end and he saw himself there. This story reflects the idea given in the Upanishads. Thought has a source and thought also ends. Thought is only an expression in the field of consciousness at a particular moment in time. How can something that is only manifesting momentarily be infinite or universal? Only that which is constant, continuous, without end and without beginning can be universal or infinite.

There are boundaries in the world, but does air have any boundaries? There is no Chinese air, American air, Indian air or English air; throughout the whole planet, air is one entity. If you make a room, air exists inside the room too; the difference is that now it is contained within four walls. If you remove the four walls, the air will again become one, there will be no separation. Similarly, consciousness is one entity in the universe. Consciousness means perception of totality: perception of totality is consciousness. The visible, the invisible, the gross, the subtle, everything you can conceive of in this creation comes in the range of consciousness – the perception of totality. This perception of totality is the same at point Z as it is at point A. It is the same everywhere.

In life this consciousness is trapped inside the body. If four walls trap the air, you can put an incense stick in the room to make the air pleasant or you can put rotten waste in the room and make the air putrid. That is what you do with yourselves in the four walls of life that have trapped your consciousness. Through your behaviour, through your mentality and samskaras, you either create a beautiful smell or a rotten smell in your life. Consciousness reflects that. Thought is energy taking birth at one place in time in your life and ending also, so thought is not the permanent factor.

Such debates have happened in the Upanishads and I am telling you this straight from the Upanishads. However, in order to realize that level of oneness of consciousness existing beyond the momentariness of thought, you have to move to a higher class.

Could you please elaborate on the difference between the subconscious mind and the unconscious mind from the yogic perspective?

Modern psychology is not clear on this idea of subconscious or unconscious mind, and I do not expect it to be clear because Freudian psychology or Jungian psychology is only about one hundred years old. I have never agreed with the so-called modern psychoanalytical theories because they are juvenile, infantile.

For thousands of years human civilizations have existed on this earth. Did they live the whole time without a way of managing their mental and emotional problems? No. Many civilizations came, many civilizations went. The common factor in all the civilizations was that each one had to confront the mind, each one had to confront society and nature, each one had to confront the stresses of life and their own family problems and difficulties. These basic things have not changed at all. Previously we used to fight with bows and arrows, then with guns and cannons, and today we still fight. The worries have not changed, only the circumstances and the styles have changed. Yet all those people in the past

survived for thousands of years without any psychological intervention and help.

The yogic literatures and the Upanishadic tradition have defined consciousness and the mind in a much more detailed way than any modern psychiatrist. Psychology today talks about three states: the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious, and on the periphery acknowledges the existence of a fourth, the superconscious. Here in this part of the world we have spoken of twenty-one different stages of consciousness, not just four, and in each of these twenty-one stages of consciousness the entire perception, behaviour and mind-set is different. In the *Mandukya Upanishad* four stages of consciousness have been defined. In brief, the first stage that psychology calls 'conscious' is known as *vaishvanara*; the second or 'subconscious' stage is known as *tejas*; the third which is called 'unconscious' is known as *prajna*; and the fourth is *turiya*, the transcendental or 'superconscious' self.

'Vaishvanara' is the conscious state. 'Vaishva' comes from the word *vishwa* which means the manifest, created nature; the world of the senses, the world of thought, idea and mind is *vishwa*. *Nara* means one who identifies with it. Therefore, when consciousness identifies with the senses, the mind and the outer world, and interacts with it, that is the conscious level or *vaishvanara*. It is like a grown-up person playing with children; he laughs, sings, jumps, dances, runs and skips. He is totally engrossed and involved with the children, totally extroverted and dynamic. That is the state of *vaishvanara*, the conscious component.

The subconscious mind is called *tejas*. *Tejas* means luminosity. It is the after-image that remains. When you practise *trataka* or when you look at any object for some time and then you close the eyes, you do not see the object, but you see the after-image of the object inside. Similarly, when cut off from the senses and the material world, the after-image, the after-effect of the memories and the impressions and the sensory perceptions continue to linger, and that is the subconscious mind. *Tejas* is the luminosity, the after-image

that is seen. The unconscious state is *prajna*. *Prajna* means one who is aware of oneself. In the unconscious state there is total disconnection from the material and the sensorial world. When you sleep at night you are unconscious. You are not aware of hunger or thirst, not aware of the need for urination, not aware of pain in the body, not aware of the environment, there is absolute disconnection. Where are you at that time? The awareness merges with the identity of the self, and only 'I' exist. The last stage is the *turiya*, the transcendental.

This Upanishad describes what the limbs are of each particular state of consciousness. It says the vaishvanara consciousness has twenty-one mouths and nineteen limbs. How to interpret these twenty-one mouths? How to decipher what are the nineteen limbs? Imagine a person with twenty-one mouths and nineteen limbs. It is symbolic. The interpretation and the knowledge of the components and the attributes of consciousness have been clearly defined and outlined in these literatures.

You questioned me about the subconscious and unconscious. Yes, I can give you an answer which is standard. The subconscious is a dimension where thoughts, feelings, attitudes, emotions and instincts take birth. The unconscious is the area of *samskaras* and *karmas*, impressions and conditionings that we create or bring with us. However if you want to know about them in detail, then I would recommend that you study the *Mandukya Upanishad*. You will discover new things, and maybe get the answer as to what is the meaning of the twenty-one mouths and nineteen limbs.

—23 October 2007

In tantra there are two aspects of guru, external and internal. If a person is graced with an awakened internal aspect of guru, can the world itself serve as that person's external aspect of guru?

For some, yes, but for you I will not recommend it. It is easy to develop the thought, 'The world is my guru and I

can learn from anything and everything', but that does not serve the purpose. The relationship a disciple has with the guru is not only a relationship of learning, it is a connection with that source of light, knowledge and peace. Not only in tantra or yoga has the relationship been spoken of, in other traditions and religions, too, everybody has spoken about the need of the guru.

People say that the guru is inside. People also say God is inside, but nobody says, "I can feel my God inside." I have heard some people say, "I can feel the guru inside," but that is just pure fantasy from their own mind, because this internal guru is actually God. Who can be your internal guru? Tell me that. If guru is inside you, who is it? Is it Swami Sivananda, is it Swami Satyananda, is it Swami Niranjanananda? No. No. No. The meaning of the word *guru* is dispeller of darkness; the one who ultimately removes the darkness inside is an external person whom you have identified as the guru.

Be clear about your relationship

This internal guru is synonymous with God. The role of the outer guru is to give you the skills and the knowledge to come into contact with this inner Self. In the period of instruction between guru and disciple a relationship develops between them. That relationship is spiritual, but people confuse it with an emotional, intellectual or even physical relationship. People have only experienced physical relationships, mental relationships and emotional relationships, so the new thing which they are experiencing is converted into something that they have already gone through, an experience that they can identify with. Then guru becomes an emotional matter, an intellectual matter or a physical matter.

Those disciples who can remain true to the understanding and the awareness of the spiritual connection do not feel the absence of guru. As another traveller on the path, I will give you myself as an example. I live away from

my guru, but never once have I thought, 'I wish I could be with him'. My own guru brothers and sisters would jump up and down with joy and glee whenever Sri Swamiji came to any program or place where we were. They would say "Swamiji is coming, we shall be with him!" Those sentiments never mattered to me. He came, fine. He went, fine. No problem; no happiness at his coming, and no tears at his going.

Why did I feel like this? It was because I never felt that I was away from him, I never felt that I was missing him, I never felt that I was far from him. Although at that time I could not understand it, today I do believe that this happened because of a different connection. I was not seeing my guru as a person to fulfil my physical needs, my emotional, intellectual or social needs. I was seeing him as my guru. Also I saw that I was responsible for my life, not that he was responsible for my life. When an intellectual link or emotional link develops, one of the pitfalls is that you become dependent on the guru. 'I'll do what Gururji tells me to do'. What is this? In fact I am wary of people who say, 'I'll do anything you tell me to.' I feel like saying, 'Okay, please get out of my sight.' I am wary of such people; this type of dependence changes the entire relationship between guru and disciple.

Protect your spiritual relationship

People have not been able to understand a spiritual relationship. The role of the outer guru is to provide you with the skills and the know-how to access your own inner Self. This holds true not only in tantra but in every tradition. The thing that one should be concerned about is how to maintain this connection untainted, how to maintain the connection between guru and disciple untainted. Guru is not our wastepaper basket. Guru is not our load-bearer. The person you see as a guru is also a person who is going through the same process, maybe a hundred steps ahead, that is all. It is a journey that goes on continuously.

Guru will never think of himself as a guru. Swami Satyananda is a disciple of Swami Sivananda, living the teaching of Swami Sivananda. He can be my guru, but that is my feeling. As far as he is concerned, he is a disciple. I can be guru to hundreds, but that is their feeling. As long as I live, I will continue to imbibe and live the teaching of my guru and my tradition of gurus. It is not that somebody begins to think, 'I've become a guru'. Those who think that are false prophets. I am telling you this frankly. Those who remain true to their effort as disciples eventually become the luminaries of the age.

The relationship between guru and disciple is simple. It is based on innocence, simplicity, faith and belief. These are the four qualities needed in a disciple: simplicity of mind, innocence of heart, faith in guru and belief in oneself. Rather than thinking about the type of guru you are looking for, think what qualities you need to qualify as a disciple. If you have the right qualities to qualify as a disciple, guru will appear. You do not have to search, but you have to have the qualities.

One should definitely consider how to improve one's own discipleship and connection and how to keep the sanctity of that connection intact. You have to protect your faith, you have to protect your belief. Many times farmers put a scarecrow in a field to drive away the birds. What kind of scarecrow have you put in your field to drive away the birds that come and eat your peace? Do you have a scarecrow which stops the birds from coming and eating your crop? No. One has to put up a scarecrow in life to ward off the negative, the evil and the destructive forces. In that manner, one can protect one's faith, conviction and belief, and be accepting of everything.

—23 October 2007

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Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



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ISBN :978-93-84753-23-8